Paul Shepard & Barry Sanders: "Celebrations of the Bear"

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

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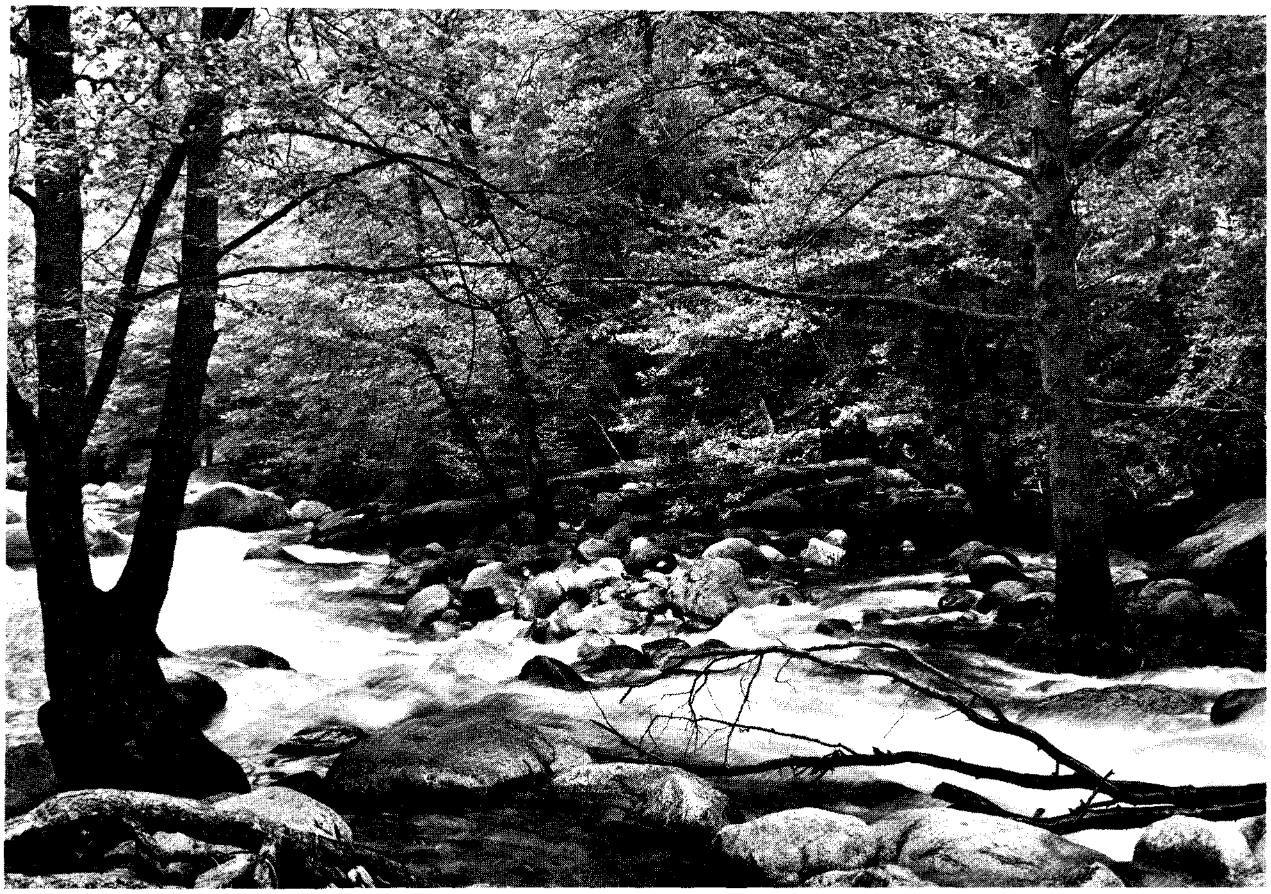
To Explore, Enjoy, and Protect. . .



Bruce Barnbaum

You and I share a great love of this earth.

The ocean's pounding surf, Spring covering the earth with that season's newness, a bird's song reaching out. . . and we are moved.

Our curiosity calls us. We explore a bit. Some travel to a distant wilderness, some no farther than a corner of the back yard. But each of us looks and listens to the wonder of the natural world around us.

We enjoy the earth's beauty, its grandeur. The endless sweep of colors, and sounds, and everywhere, the excitement of life.

But there are some that do not see the wonder of it all. And so we, of the Sierra Club, join together to protect the earth.

We work for legislation that guarantees clean air and water. To regulate the use and disposal of poisonous toxic chemicals. To set aside the most special places for parks and wilderness.

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To explore, to enjoy. To protect this wondrous earth. For all of us. . . forever.

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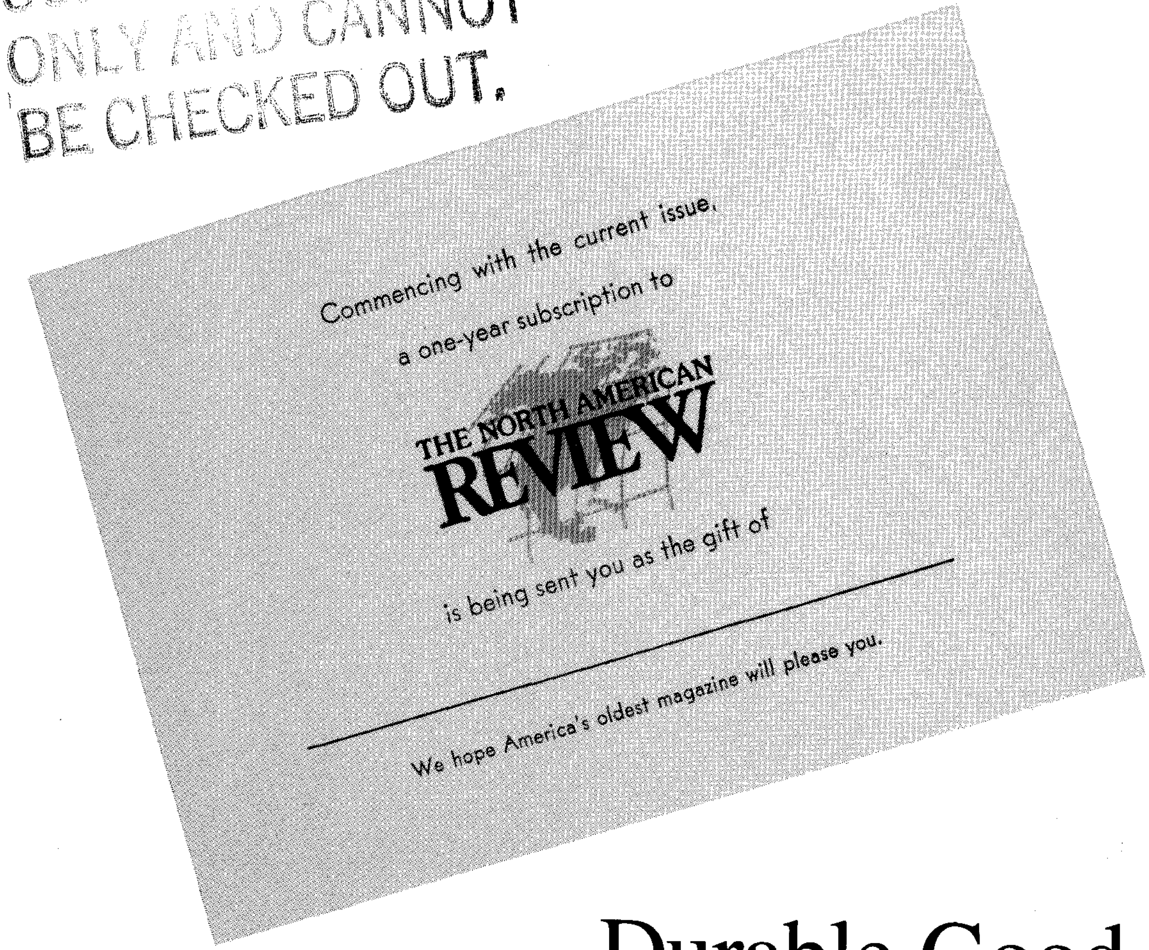

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THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW.
SINCE 1815.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Ten years ago in the NAR there appeared a brief essay-with-photographs by Barry Lopez, dealing with the North American wolf—a forerunner, as it turned out, of the stunning *Of Wolves and Men* (Scribners, 1978). This month, this year, we offer another animal excerpt—a chapter (p. 17) from the new Paul Shepard/Barry Sanders book, *The Sacred Paw*, which deals with the bear in literature, myth, and fact. (Coincidentally, the M. Kasper drawings on pages 78-79 touch the same subject; no doubt there are other serendipitous Bear Allusions, unindexed, in the pages of the magazine.) *The Sacred Paw* is due out from Viking next month.

On pages 39-44 is a new bouquet of so-called Unclassifieds—"so-called" because *we* know what they really are: brief, offbeat, delectable pieces of prose whose residual pleasure far outweighs the small space they fill.

Some bookish notes of interest to NAR readers:

The story by W. P. Kinsella, "Gabon" (p. 33), is from a new collection called *The Alligator Report*, to be published next month by Coffee House Press (P.O. Box 546, West Branch, Iowa 52358) . . . Charles Johnson's "Moving Pictures" (p. 45) will appear in his new collection, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (Atheneum), due out in January . . . Jim Heyen's new book of stories, *You Know What Is Right*, has just been published by North Point Press . . . Pamela Painter's story collection, *Getting to Know the Weather*, is just out from University of Illinois Press . . . Scott Russell Sanders' *The Paradise of Bombs* has won the 1985 Associated Writing Programs non-fiction award.

Beth Nugent's "City of Boys" (NAR, September 1984) is included in the new edition of Best American Short Stories (Houghton Mifflin) . . . Jeanne Wilmot's "Dirt Angel" (March 1985) will be included in *Prize Stories 1986: The O. Henry Awards* (Doubleday).

Second reminder: the increase in this magazine's subscription rates is, alas, imminent. The best last chance to subscribe at the old rates (domestically, $9 a year, or $8 a year for gifts) arrives just in time for Christmas, and until December 1st we will accept old-rate renewals for as many years as our readers can afford.

Readers who are also fiction writers should take note that the Fiction Department of this magazine is closed until January 1st. Fiction manuscripts received in the meantime will be returned unread.

★ THE NORTH AMERICAN ★

REVIEW

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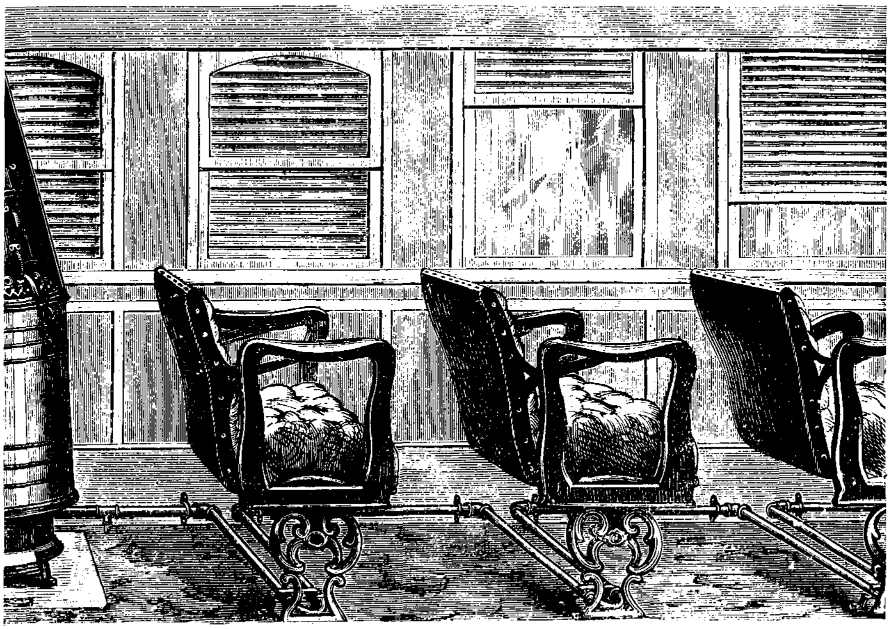
Leaving China

DOROTHEA BARRETT



Day One

The air on the train was hot and stagnant. Wang and Lili climbed on bunks, lifted seats, stowing my bags away with the expertise of the non-traveler who has given travel a lot of thought. First I kissed Lili, then I kissed Wang. He turned away quickly because his eyes were wet. I thought, If he cries now he'll get into trouble. Wang and Lili got off the train. On the opposite bunk sat a young German who sniffed. He looked miserably hot. I took out two fans, which were to have been presents for my sisters, and gave him one. Outside on the platform Wang and Lili were dithering about. I flapped my fan at them. "Go home!" I yelled. "Go on. Go home!" Wang shuffled about indecisively, half waved, then sauntered off. He always walked as if his shoes were too big for him. Lili followed, chattering contentedly. The train lurched. This is it, I told the self who listens with calm skepticism, Now I am leaving China.

I was on my way home after teaching for two years at a university in Peking. Wang had been my closest friend. We had told each other embarrassing secrets; we had hurt each other's feelings; we had a lot of inside jokes. Lili was a different sort of friend. With her I had stimulating discussions about feminism, freedom of the arts, female infanticide. After living in China, westerners have difficulty with the concept of friendship. Mao said, "We have friends all over the world." It is written in the Peking Hotel. Foreigners were provided with the Friendship Hotel and the Friendship Store and the Friendship Bus. I lived at the university, shopped at the local market, and rode on the public buses, but that made no fundamental difference. For two years I had been officially greeted as a Foreign Friend, yet every effort of the Chinese leaders was to keep me in isolation, and the few friendships that survived the impediments were rendered so self-conscious as to be unnatural, unnutritive. When my two friends walked off down the platform, I thought that I would feel sad, regretful, or nostalgic, but in fact I just felt a guilty indifference.

George came into the compartment, followed by a young well-dressed Japanese. They were to occupy the upper bunks. George had been a student at People's University. When I first met him, he was drunk and disorderly at the Queen's Birthday Party on the lawn of the British Embassy. He was tall, thin, pale, and eccentric, a student of Chinese and Russian. The previous year he had studied in Moscow.

"This isn't bad, is it?" said George, unpacking regiments of canned vegetables, on which he apparently planned to subsist until we reached Moscow. "Did you notice the Chinese lot at the other end of this carriage? I think they're leaving for good, judging by the amount of gear they've packed."

"Oh?" I did not want any more Chinese friends at the moment. I wanted drinking companions, chess partners, people who would be willing to swap Agatha Christie novels.

"Right. I'm off to find some Russians," said George brightly, and he disappeared.

People were reconnoitering in the corridor. I went out, lit a cigarette, and tried to look socially accessible. Outside, the flat familiar landscape of northern China sped by in darkness.

A large Australian with an open bottle of beer came up to me. "Howjado?" he said, bestowing a regretful glance on my unvoluptuous bosom. "Listen. Have you got any Chinese money? That's all they take in the dining car, you know. If you're in a pinch, just drop by my compartment. I'll give you a good rate."

"I brought my own food."

"I'll give you two yuan for the dollar. Can't be fairer than that. It's hell being stuck in a train with nothing to eat but canned food."

"The bank rate is two twenty-seven." This was not a success; we were not becoming friends. I looked around wistfully for other possibilities.

The Japanese stepped into the corridor. "Good evening. My name is Yokoyama. I am most pleased to meet you," he said, with the intensity of one who has decided to make three friends before bedtime. I turned to him gratefully, but the Australian was already swooping with talons extended.

"Straight from Japan, are you? No time to change money?"

I squeezed past the bulk of the Australian and went off to investigate the rest of the carriage. In the next compartment, a portly young American was speaking slowly, loudly, and deliberately to a featherlight Chinese. Further on, a lovely Swedish girl was reading a spy thriller. At the end of the corridor, half a dozen Chinese were eating Convenient Noodles from tin cups and speaking in the dialect of the south. I squatted down with them and said, "Hello."

"Ah!" said the mother. "You speak Chinese! You speak Chinese very well!"

With dwindling hopes, I followed the familiar routine. "But all I said was 'Hello.' "

"Really well! Wonderful! You speak excellent Chinese," said the mother.

"Perfect!" said a young woman.

"Better than us!" said a man, getting carried away.

I introduced myself, in an effort to change the subject, and they all introduced themselves, minutely explaining their relationships. "Where are you going?" I asked.

"Paris," said the mother proudly. She ran her fingers through her little boy's spikey hair. He laid his head coyly on her shoulder and smiled at me. He was beautiful. "My husband works in a shoe factory in Paris. He has been there for three years, and now we are going to join him."

"Are you all going to Paris?" I asked.

"No, no, no," said the older man. "Me? Where am I going?" He pointed to his nose and raised his eyebrows, as if he really expected an answer to that age-old question. "I am going to Yugoslavia! My uncle lives there. He has a job for me. Everything is arranged."

"And you?" I asked the younger man, who had been smilingly silent throughout the conversation. He was very small and handsome. His hair reached his collar, and he wore tight blue jeans. My friends in Peking would have called him an Imitation Overseas Chinese.

"I am going to Holland," he said, smiling at me with the peculiar warmth and charm that time and time again has lured me back to the Chinese when I thought I could not stand them anymore.

"Where are you from?" I asked them.

"We are all from Wen Zhou."

Wang was from Wen Zhou. He too wanted to leave China. His English was fluent and he was a professional interpreter, so he could make a good life for himself in the west, but his work unit would never let him go. They needed his skills and doubted his loyalty, and either of those reasons alone would have been sufficient to eliminate his chances of ever leaving. He had been my student when I first came to China. For a long time I had taken him for granted. He was short and undistinguished-looking with cropped hair and a plain Mao suit. Essentially a conservative and patriotic Chinese, he had none of the glamor of the young dissident artists, tall, elegant, long-haired northerners I had known and admired. It took me a long time to realize how much better Wang was than the others. He was loyal and unaffected. He kept coming to see me even when the Public Security Bureau had made it very clear that it would be safer not to. In the end Wang got into far more trouble than the more exciting artists and intellectuals who really deserved it. They had ridiculed their government to a foreigner, and their secret lives contradicted everything that New China stands for, but they flattered the right people and participated in the right community activities. Wang got into trouble because he was honest. He paid not so much for his sins, which were trifling, as for the fact that he did not have the decency to cover them up.

"Ah! So you know Wen Zhou?" asked the younger man, whose name was Chen. He offered me a cigarette with the quick sociability of one who sees an opportunity to talk about something he loves.

"I've never been there, but I have a friend from Wen Zhou. He told me a lot about it."

"It's a good place, Wen Zhou," said Chen. "Good people, good food. I've only been away two weeks, and I miss it already."

"Why did you leave?"

Chen looked at me askance through his cigarette smoke. "You tell me: is China any good? Go on. Tell me."

"The economy is poor—"

"Too true! The life of Chinese people is no good. There's nothing in the shops! You work all your life for low wages, and even if you do save some money, or a relative living abroad sends you some, you can't buy anything with it! You try buying a refrigerator in Wen Zhou. Or a bicycle! Even a bicycle is nearly impossible to get." He squatted silently for a while, puffing on his cigarette and occasionally shaking his head.

I had heard the same speech often, with minor variations, and had felt guilty, as I listened, for being exempt. The salary that the university had paid me was ten times the salary of my Chinese peers. I could afford beer and cigarettes, and I could buy dinner for my friends. That is what friendship came down to in China—buying them dinner.

Listening to Chen I felt guilty for another reason: guilty of being bored and disappointed with his opinions, having thought, for a fleeting moment, that he was going to talk about political repression, aesthetic poverty, about the spiritual beating that the Chinese take every day. I had tried to repress a resentment that this ordinary man could leave China, while Wang was stuck there, with the intelligence and sensitivity to feel both his material and his spiritual wants.

"What was your salary?" asked Chen.

"Six hundred yuan."

"Was it enough?"

"Of course it was enough. It was too much." I had gone through this conversation many times also. Repetition never seems to tire the Chinese. In fact they seem to enjoy it for its own sake, as in a mating dance or a drinking song or responses in church. But as a westerner, unsoftened by five thousand years of ritual culture, I found the repetition unbearable, like Chinese water torture—drip, drip, drip. And following the stale futile path of this conversation, I suddenly missed Wang. I remembered the way he shuffled off down the platform with the sense of loss that I should have felt at the time, and in memory my words to him, "Go on. Go home!" were brutal.

Day Two

The dining car was crowded, so George and I decided to eat canned fruit and Convenient Noodles after all. We bought a bottle of vodka from the woman at the cash register and ricocheted down the corridor in what was to become the routine of daily migration: down the corridor, open the first door, step onto the vibrating steel plate between the carriages (the ground rushing by beneath. One slip of the foot and—), close the second door, down the next corridor, trying not to step on infants or embrace strange men who were out for a smoke.

In the carriage before our own, we heard deep voices singing a Russian song. The guards were sitting in one compartment, drinking cheap Chinese wine. George paused by the door to say a few words to them in Russian. I stuck the bottle of vodka into the doorway; a crescendo of approval and welcome rose in the smoky cabin. The guards made room for us, and everyone kissed the hand that had brought the vodka.

"I am Vanya," said the guard of our carriage, who looked like Charlie Chaplin. "And this is Mitya, Dolya, Vladi, and Vovo."

"What is your nationality?"

"Where are you going?"

"How is it that you speak Russian?"

George explained his situation and mine, occasionally pausing to interpret for me. The Russians and I grinned at each other with the helpless good will of people who share no common language. I raised my glass to them. "Vodka!" I said. "Tolstoy! Dostoyevski! Chekhov!" They laughed, slapped my back, kissed my hand again.

"But Dostoyevski," said Vovo gravely. "Dostoyevski is not good."

"Gorki!" I tried again. "Mayakovski. Gogol."

"These two," said Vanya. "These two are good. They are funny. They are kind. I have always liked the English." He poured another round of vodkas, and Mitya ran in with a plate of biscuits and tomatoes. Vladi was inspired to give us a baritone solo, which was greeted with much enthusiasm and toasting. Vanya raised his glass. "To world peace!" he said. "This is all we want. We Russians. The common people just want peace. Dolya here fought in the Great War." All eyes turned to Dolya, an enormous, red-faced, white-haired guard, who squirmed under our sudden attention. "We never want war again. Isn't that right, Dolya? To world peace!"

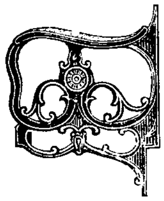
"To the Russian bear!" grunted Dolya.

The vodka was finished, and everyone contemplated the emptiness of the bottle with profound weltschmertz.

"I'll get another," I said.

When I came back with the vodka, they were all singing again. George knew the songs and sang along lustily, rocked by nostalgia for the Russians he had known and for his year in Moscow, after which Peking had seemed a sterile and ungratifying place. The heavy Russian bodies lurched with the movement of the train, the rhythm of the song, the swilling of vodka. Having eaten nothing, I was quietly tipsy in the corner, practicing how to say, "To the Russian bear."

At the emotional highpoint of a particularly romantic song, an inspector loomed in the doorway. He snapped at the guards and pointed an accusing finger at Vanya. Vodka and tomatoes vanished amid abject apologies, feeble excuses, protestations that this was merely a five-minute break. Heavy-eyed middle-aged men cowered like disobedient children. The whites of George's eyes flushed pink with memories and bitterness. I was irritated; I thought he over-reacted, as I had done often in China; I was sick of the melodrama of foreigners in a communist country who profess to be horrified but are secretly titillated by their involvement in a world of LeCarré excitement and Solzhenitsin tragedy. It insulted the paltry suffering of the people around us. Was it not possible—as it seemed to me, whose only relation to Russia was that of the passing tourist—that the inspector was simply an angry boss justifiably breaking up a silly little vodka party? I had an impulse to laugh in George's face, yet if these had been Chinese guards, if this had been a Chinese inspector, I would have felt just as George was feeling. The part of me that jeered at George was silently and sarcastically quoting the western right wing press: "the Oppression of Totalitarianism"; "the Iron Fist of Soviet Tyranny." But somewhere else in my vodka-fogged brain I believed that perhaps for George, perhaps without or at least quite aside from any unworthy relish of sensationalism, this *was* the manifestation of Russian authority, the falling of the fist that had wrecked so many things for him the previous year. In Peking there had been rumors about George: an affair with a Russian woman, a dissident, whom George had wished to marry, but the affair had been smashed just as our vodka party was being smashed now. I tried desperately to sober up.



The inspector stormed off down the corridor. Everyone shook our hands. "Tomorrow we reach the border," said Vladi apologetically. "You see how it is. It would be better—"

"Of course," said George. "No need to explain. See you later."

We left quickly, George in the lead, silent and brooding. I followed him, richocheting a little more than usual, still trying to pronounce, "To the Russian bear."

Day Three

At six we were woken by Dolya, who told us that we were approaching the border. He delivered his message curtly, with no acknowledgement of the previous evening. Within half an hour, Chinese customs had come and gone, and everyone was in the corridor, leaning out of windows. It was a clear, cool, sunny day. The grasslands rolled gently in all directions. Leaning out into the sunlight, I was hit by the sweet wet smell of grass. Just ahead was the first fence. We passed fence after fence. Fences running parallel, perpendicular, diagonal. No sign of life, just fence after fence after fence.

"It's probably all land mines around here," said an English woman from Singapore, hoisting her camera into position. Down the length of the corridor, cameras were being raised like little cannon. People were asking questions of their equally ignorant neighbors. I could hear the Australian holding forth to the portly American in their compartment. The American probably wanted to come out and take pictures but was too polite to snub the incurious Australian.

"You can sell a pair of blue jeans on this train for two hundred rubles," said the Australian. "I brought along a few pairs just in case. Cost me eight dollars each in Hong Kong. And cassettes! These Russian bastards would sell their balls for a good cassette . . . "

Chen appeared at my side and gazed out of the window. "Leaving China," he said, with the dreamy sentimentality of a Chinese radio propagandist.

"Are you sorry?"

"No. I've worked three years for this. It has cost me ten thousand yuan. I have dreamt of this for a long time."

"Ten thousand yuan?"

"Yes. In tickets, visas, and, well, you know—bribes."

Yes. Of course. And where did he get the money? I wondered. Wen Zhou was famous for its black market.

The first C.C.C.P. sign went by outside, the first stocky, ruddy, blond-haired Russian soldiers. "Leaving China," said Chen, with the same intonation as before.

Day Four

The mother and elder son of the Chinese family were ill. When I went to see how they were, I found all six Chinese huddled together in their compartment, anxiously discussing something in their own dialect while the forests, lakes, and hills of Siberia fled past the window unnoticed. "What's the matter?" I asked.

The mother hesitated before answering. "Chinese customs has changed almost all our money into Chinese foreign exchange certificates," she said, without meeting my eyes. The Chinese call their nation "The Big Family," and for her, confessing the injustice of Chinese customs was like criticizing a member of her family to a passing acquaintance.

"What are you going to do? The certificates are useless outside China."

"Never mind," she said, trying to be optimistic despite nausea and worry. "They left us one thousand francs, and we can sleep in the station in Moscow."

For the first time their vulnerability was clear to me. "Do you speak any foreign languages?"

They shook their heads.

"The train to Berlin leaves from a different station, you know."

"Does it?" They looked frightened.

I was amazed by their courage or naiveté or desperation—whatever it was that induced them to leave China on a train, to travel for ten or twelve days through countries where no one speaks Chinese, where they had little hope of successfully ordering a meal, much less finding transportation, hotels, stations, platforms. "I'll take you to the station," I said.

They all brightened up considerably, opened cans of fruit, and admonished me to eat, accepting no refusal, in accordance with Chinese custom. The little boy sat on my lap and put his arm around my neck. The mother told him to call me "Auntie."

Day Five

I think that the little boy had been sent by his mother to talk to me. He seemed to think it his responsibility to charm me so that I would not lose interest before Moscow. He sat beside me in my compartment, occasionally cocking his head and smiling at me in a way calculated to captivate. I was teaching him to count in French. He learned quickly and repeated the strange syllables flawlessly. When George came in, I turned from the boy to ask questions about Moscow.

As we pulled into another small station, the boy slipped away to look out of the window. I did not notice his absence until he screamed and ran back into the compartment. He grabbed my arm and pulled. "Come, come," he said.

Most of the passengers were crowded against the corridor windows. We squeezed in between Chen and the portly American.

◆

Three yards away, on the platform, a group of prisoners were kneeling, surrounded by soldiers. The prisoners were pale, some had shaven heads, each carried a small sack of possessions; some were wearing the grey and black stripes of prison, others wore their own clothes, which were no less dreary. "Why are they kneeling?" asked the little boy.

"I don't know."

"Where are they going?"

"I think they are going to Siberia."

They frightened me. I had read about them so often, yet I was shocked to see them, separated from me by three yards and a pane of glass. I could see the pimple on one man's cheek, the dirt in another man's ear.

"What have they done wrong? Who are they? Are they murderers?"

I wanted to shake the boy off my arm and yell at him, "How should I know? I'm the same as you."

I knew that George would disappear the moment we reached Moscow. I did not want to depend on him because of my pride and because I knew I could not depend on him. As we got closer to Moscow, the excitement and carefree swagger of the travelers gave way to anxiety. Every morning more people turned up in our compartment, asking George, "How do you say, 'Bread and soup,' in Russian?" "Could you write down the name of my hotel in Russian?" "Which subway stop is Intourist at?" George had the look of a mother with six children in a department store. He began ignoring their questions, spending hours in distant carriages where no one knew that he spoke Russian. He became preoccupied, thinking of things other than this train, these nervous people. He took on the glazed look of the mother in the store who says, "They're not my kids."

"Are they going to be shot? Is it like the executions in China? Are they bad people?"

"I don't know. I've never been in Russia before."

I remember the mother opening the can of lychees, pushing them on me though I was not hungry. The relief in her eyes. "You've got guts. We need someone with guts." And I felt afraid of getting off the train with these people and their interminable luggage. The weight of the little boy seemed to be the weight of his mother, his brother, the young woman, and the two men, all forcing the syrupy fruit down my throat so that there would be a compact, so that I would carry them, bag and baggage, across a strange city in which I was as ignorant as they.

The soldiers barked instructions at the prisoners. The prisoners rose from their knees and moved off slowly. Beyond the little boy I could see Chen watching them. His eyes followed them with a mixture of fascination and fear. He remained standing at the window long after the prisoners had gone and the other passengers had returned to their games and books.

A defense against cancer can be cooked up in your kitchen.

There is evidence that diet and cancer are related. Some foods may promote cancer, while others may protect you from it.

Foods related to lowering the risk of cancer of the larynx and esophagus all have high amounts of carotene, a form of Vitamin A which is in cantaloupes, peaches, broccoli, spinach, all dark green leafy vegetables, sweet potatoes, carrots, pumpkin, winter squash, and tomatoes, citrus fruits and brussels sprouts.

Foods that may help reduce the risk of gastrointestinal and respiratory tract cancer are cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts, kohlrabi, cauliflower.

Fruits, vegetables and whole-grain cereals such as oatmeal, bran and wheat may help lower the risk of colorectal cancer.

Foods high in fats, salt- or nitrite-cured foods such as ham, and fish and types of sausages smoked by traditional methods should be eaten in moderation.

Be moderate in consumption of alcohol also.

A good rule of thumb is cut down on fat and don't be fat. Weight reduction may lower cancer risk. Our 12-year study of nearly a million Americans uncovered high cancer risks particularly among people 40% or more overweight.

Now, more than ever, we know you can cook up your own defense against cancer. So eat healthy and be healthy.

No one faces cancer alone.

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY®

Day Six

The train pulled into Moscow station at seven in the evening. As the passengers swarmed onto the platform, I ignored George, allowing him to lose himself in the crowd, and he did. Two representatives from the Chinese Embassy were there to meet the family. The father had thought of everything as he bit his fingernails in Paris. I was immensely relieved. The mother too was relieved. She turned to these unknown and unfriendly-looking Chinese as if they were her relatives, members, however distant, of the Big Family. She thanked me warmly, looking younger than she had on the train, relieved that she would not have to depend on a foreigner. The little boy kissed me, counted to ten in French, said "Goodbye," bowed and smiled as if to a curtain call.

I swung my bags onto my shoulders and walked toward the subway entrance. Then someone called to me in Chinese. Chen and the other man, Zhang, were running down the platform with two enormous suitcases, and the portly American was lumbering after them, waving.

"The Embassy people have received a letter about the family, but they've no instructions about us, so they won't help!" said Zhang, with the look of one who plans to demand his money back.

"You'd better come with me then," I said.

"Are you going to Intourist?" asked the American.

"Yes," I replied over my shoulder as we moved off.

"So am I. Do you know where it is?"

The American came along. His name was Daniel, and I rather resented his presence. Whereas there was a certain amount of kudos in helping two stranded Chinese, there was absolutely none in helping an overweight American undergraduate. Daniel not only failed to contribute to the romance but he was so excessively unromantic himself that he seemed to quench any romance around him. For the five days we were together, Daniel acted as a sturdy and reliable sprinkler system of the flames of my adventure. "Gee, this is just like Baltimore!" I have forgotten which that was—Moscow? Warsaw? Berlin?

Chen, Zhang, Daniel, and I set off through the Moscow subway system in search of Prospekt Marx. We must have been an odd sight, dodging between the large, sedate, well-brushed Russians: a filthy, bedraggled Englishwoman carrying a couple of army green bags, followed by a hefty American with a rucksack and, in the rear, two tiny Chinese hauling thirty-kilo suitcases.

Having reached Prospekt Marx, we struggled up the steps and out, astonishingly, into Red Square. The evening light was clear and golden. The many colors of St. Basil's blazed, unreal, exotic, a shock to the senses. Chen and Zhang seemed to realize for the first time that they were really out of China. They chattered excitedly in their own dialect. They shook each other's hand and my hand and Daniel's. Daniel dropped his rucksack and unsheathed his camera. "Hey! This is just like Disneyland!"

That night we toasted our arrival with Russian champagne over an elaborate meal at the National Hotel. Daniel would not take champagne. When I offered, he said, "No thanks. I've got diarrhea." Chen and Zhang, though ecstatic to be out of China, found everything unsatisfactory by comparison. They deplored the delicate turbot, they wrinkled their noses at the Chicken Kiev, they declared the champagne passable but nothing compared to *mao tai*. More than once, Chen asked me about placing a phone call to his friend, Huang, in Holland.

I was beginning to realize that Chen, Zhang, and Daniel would be with me for quite some time. They were not the traveling companions I would have chosen. For a moment I wished that George was there. But George would never be there, in a tourist hotel. He was where he wanted to be, where I would be if I had half a chance: he was somewhere out there, in Moscow.

Day Seven

At two o'clock in the morning, when Zhang, Chen, and Daniel were asleep, I slipped out to walk alone in Red Square. It had rained during the evening, and the red neon stars on the pinnacles were reflected in the wet tarmac.

As I crossed the square to the Lenin Mausoleum, I noticed the echo of footsteps other than my own. A small dark man had fallen in step with me. "Hello," he said in English. "Where have you come from?"

"Peking. Where do you come from?"

"Afghanistan."

I averted my face to hide my surprise. "Do you live in Moscow?"

"Yes. For one year now."

"Do you like living in Moscow? Do you miss your home?" I asked, turning back to him, but he was gone, vanished down a dark side street, and I was alone in the square.

Day Eight

Warsaw was a relief. After Moscow it seemed wonderfully light and European. As we piled into a taxi at the station, I realized I was even less prepared for this than I had been for Moscow. At least there I had been armed with the phrases that George had written down for me. "Cheap hotel," I said to the driver hopefully.

"Hotel, yes, I understand, but what is 'cheap'?"

"Little money," I said.

He looked non-plussed.

"Student," I ventured.

Still blank.

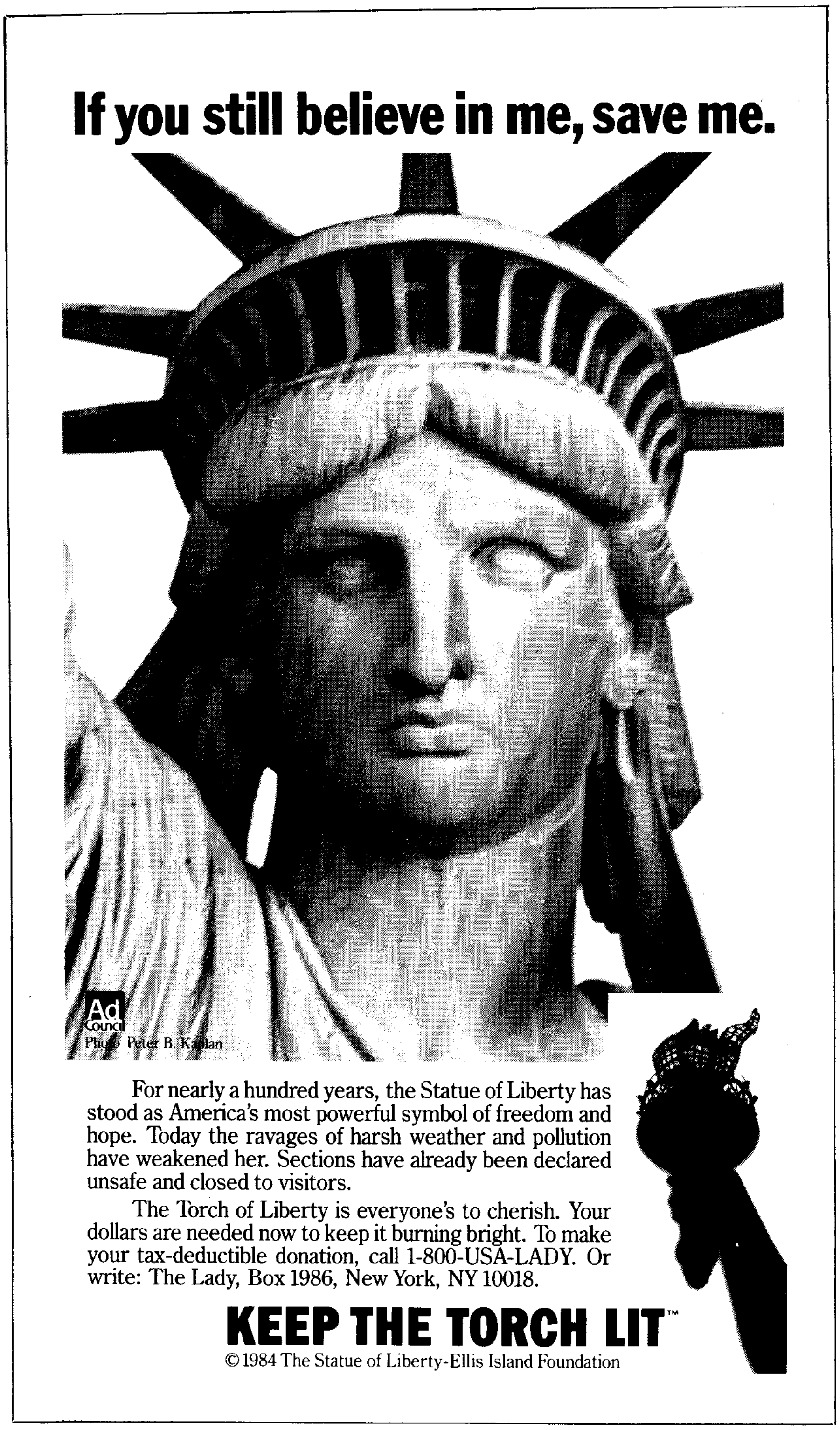
"Studentski," I tried desperately.

"Ah! Studentski! Okay!" and the taxi took off at top speed.

The hotel looked like a European youth hostel. A juke box blasted out rock music, people milled around in tight jeans, leather jackets, dangling earrings, Mohawk haircuts. One room was crammed full of video games. Young Poles were drinking espresso and eating pizza. Couples were kissing in the foyer. The only reminder that this was a communist country was the ubiquity of the black market. Each offer I received was more generous than the last. The dollar, it seemed, was worth dizzying amounts of zlotys.

The international phone lines were all busy. Every time I tried to call Holland, a recording talked in Polish. Chen was chain-smoking at my side. He had developed all sorts of irritating little tics like tapping his long fingernails on the desk. My nerves were wearing thin from travel and from constant abortive efforts to call Chen's friend. We had tried three times in Moscow.

Daniel and Zhang went off to eat. By the time they returned I was flustered, tired, and bad-tempered. Daniel had gone quiet. Zhang was talking constantly as usual, holding forth about what I was doing wrong



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Essays by David Hellerstein, Perry Glasser, Olga Carlisle and how he would handle the situation in my place. Finally I slammed the phone down. "It's impossible," I said. "I can't get through."

Chen looked at me with undisguised fear. "What's the matter?" I asked, feeling his fear creep up my legs, spread through my aching joints and muscles.

For the first time in two days, Daniel took some initiative. "You wait here," he told Zhang and Chen. "We'll be back in fifteen minutes." He took me to the bar, ordered a double vodka, and told me to knock it back. When I had done so, he said, "Chen doesn't have a Dutch visa."

Day Nine

I suppose Daniel realized the significance of that right away. I had already known that Chen had no West German visa, but I thought he could get one on the train. Because, as an Englishwoman, I am used to sailing through European customs, I assumed that Chen could too. Certainly, I thought, a transit visa through West Germany would be no problem. The fact that he wanted to live in Holland made a Dutch visa a little more difficult, but I thought that he could probably get a tourist visa on the train then apply for an immigrant's visa once he got to Holland. In defense of my intelligence, I would like to say that I had been on trains for nine days, my last substantial meal had been dinner in Moscow the previous evening, and the journey had been such a blitz of bizarre experiences that my powers of logical thought were, by this time, reduced to rubble.

We had sent a telegram to Chen's friend in Holland, asking him to meet us in East Berlin. Chen now had three dollars to his name. Daniel and I had decided that if Huang did not turn up at East Berlin, we would split the cost of Chen's ticket to Amsterdam.

With this plan agreed upon, we all felt more relaxed and enjoyed ourselves in the Old City of Warsaw. We took photographs of each other and got a passer-by to take one of us all together. We ate ice cream. Chen and Zhang rhapsodized about how much better Warsaw was than Moscow.

That evening, tired, happy, and excited to be so near the west, we boarded yet another train and set off for East Berlin.

Day Ten

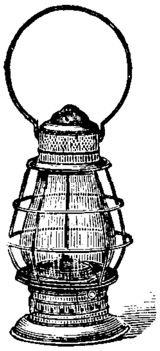
It was the worst train yet. The berths were sold out, and the carriages and compartments were so badly marked that everyone just occupied the nearest seat. The seats were hard, the compartment was overcrowded, and people kept waking us up to tell us that we were in the wrong seats. We got to East Berlin, aching and unkempt. There was no sign of Huang.

I stood on line with Zhang to buy his ticket to Belgrade. The station was swarming with flies. We waited for an hour and a quarter, amid crying babies and sneaky-looking types who were trying to jump the line. A bewildered young Englishman asked me questions about the train to Paris; I am ashamed to say that I told him to piss off.

By now Chen was glazed over with fear. He would not answer questions. He would not eat. He kept wandering off aimlessly. From my place in line, I watched him sitting forlornly on the steps.

When at last we got the ticket, which was for ten o'clock that evening, we showed Zhang the platform and the restaurant, then we said our goodbyes. Zhang and I wished each other long life, although there had been many times on the journey when we had wished each other a quick and violent death. We left him, bookless and friendless, on the platform, and went off in search of the S-bahn to West Berlin.

"One down, one to go," muttered Daniel.



We took the train to Friedrichstrasse. At the check point, we waited in line for forty-five minutes. Chen was very quiet; Daniel was describing his excrement in lurid detail. By the time we got to the customs man, I was half asleep. We gave our passports; he stamped them and gave them back. I thought, That was easy, and we boarded the underground for West Berlin city center.

At the station, we bought our tickets to Amsterdam. Again there were no berths. I changed money and got a pocketful of coin, then Chen and I went to the phone. This time there were lines to Holland, but the recording said I had the wrong number. If we could not find this friend of Chen's (whose existence I was beginning to doubt) I would be stuck with a homeless destitute Chinese in Amsterdam. I dialed and dialed but could not get through.

Finally I checked the code. It was mistaken. I dialed the correct number. A woman answered the phone. "Hello," I said in Chinese.

"Hello?" she said in Dutch.

"Hello!" I yelled in Chinese. "Is this Mr. Huang's residence?"

"Hello?" she said in Dutch.

I slammed down the receiver.

"This is the wrong number," I said. "The woman who answered was Dutch."

"Really?" said Chen absently.

"What do you mean, 'Really'?" I exploded. "What about 'I'm sorry'? What about 'I'm sorry I wasted your last two days calling a goddamned wrong number'?" and much more I do not care to remember. Chen started to cry. He squatted on the floor and buried his face in his hands and shook with crying. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry." He looked so small crouching there in the huge expanse of shiny linoleum, and chunky Germans looking at him coolly and quizzically as they passed. I squatted down beside him.

"Don't cry," I said. I put my arm around his shuddering shoulders. "Stop it, will you?" I remembered the charming lively man he had been on the train from Peking. He was almost catatonic now. "Is there another number?" I asked. "Is there anyone else we can call?" He reached into his back pocket and produced the little address book which by this time was grimy with his thumb prints and mine.

The number was in Rotterdam. I called. Someone answered. He said "Hello" in Chinese. I handed the phone to Chen.

Afterwards we joined Daniel in the cafe and told him the good news. The friend in Rotterdam would meet us at Amsterdam station, and in the meantime he would try to contact the friend we had been unable to reach. We all drank a beer to celebrate—

even Daniel, despite the possible consequences to his bowels.

Our train was leaving at half past midnight, so we had all evening to roam around town. Daniel insisted that we eat at McDonald's. Chen was not impressed. "Ham-bur-ger," pronounced Daniel patiently. "Come on. Repeat after me. 'Ham-bur-ger.' "

After dinner we wandered through a shopping mall. Chen looked like Alice in Wonderland. Window after window of clothes, shoes, books, electrical appliances, cosmetics, furs, sporting goods, televisions, computers. He saw more consumer goods in that first hour than he had seen in his life.

For the first time since Moscow, Chen was relaxed. He thought he was safe. He lost his stubborn closed look and started to ask questions, watch people, and laugh aloud in pleasure and surprise. I felt really fond of him.

We returned to the square by the station and sat in a terrace de café at the foot of a huge Art Deco fountain. Water streamed over strange sculptures, smooth surfaces of stone, hidden lights. A cool wind, flecked with spray, blew in our faces. We ordered white wine and a big chocolate nut sundae for Chen. Young travelers waded in the fountain; Berlin teenagers disco roller-skated in the square. Women passed by in outrageous clothing, their hair dyed purple or green. I watched Chen watching them. Three weeks ago he had probably been squatting outside some noodle shop in Wen Zhou with his friends, watching the donkey carts go by, bragging about how he was going to leave China and start a new life. Or perhaps he was in the cramped kitchen of his one-story house, eating rice and white cabbage with a few shreds of pork fat, telling his small children what it would be like when they joined him in Holland, knowing that he knew no more than they.

Daniel nodded off in his chair. The sky turned a deep blue, speckled with stars. I ordered two more glasses of wine for Chen and me. His eyes were never still, always following someone or exploring the fountain in amazement. Occasionally he would ask me, "Man or woman?"

"Are you feeling better now?" I asked, after a long silence, trying awkwardly to apologize for my loss of temper.

He reached over and squeezed

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my hand. "Don't worry," he said. "Everything will be fine."

Day Eleven

All night they had been waking us up to see our tickets, to yell at me in German, to try to pack us off to second-class seats, to see our passports, to see Chen's passport a second time. Each time they snapped on the fluorescent light and barked instructions in German. Toward morning I yelled back in English, using the lowest kind of racial generalizations. The last time was at a quarter to six. The customs man threw open the door, pointed at Chen, and shouted, "Hey! Mister! Passport!"

Chen was still asleep. I tried to wake him. "Get up. Wake up." He did not move. I shook his shoulder. "Come on, Chen. Wake up." I patted his cheek. I shook him. He did not wake up. I thought, He's dead. What will I do if he's dead? I shook him more violently and put my head against his chest to listen to his heart. He woke up. With great resentment I handed Chen's passport to the customs man. He grinned and left. A few seconds later, an older, higher ranking official came in. He spoke English. "This man has no West German visa," he said.

"Hasn't he?" I said, made stupid by lack of sleep. "I thought the West German customs gave him one at Berlin."

"That was East German customs," said the inspector. "Well, it's too late now." He leaned forward and enunciated slowly. "It's not nice to travel without a visa."

"I'm sorry," I said.

We thought that the worst was over. At least I did. I was still under the impression that Dutch customs would stamp his passport and let us through. I was wrong. When Dutch customs boarded the train, they said that Chen would have to get off. Daniel went pale. He had been profoundly worried about his bowels and wanted to get home as quickly as possible to "have them looked into," as he put it.

"I'll get off the train with Chen. You go to Amsterdam and tell Huang what happened."

"Are you sure?" asked Daniel, but the resurgence of color in his face testified to his relief.

As we got off the train the full impact of Chen's situation finally penetrated the fog of my ignorance and fatigue. Of course Dutch customs would not give him a tourist visa. As soon as I had translated the customs man's instructions to him, Chen had resumed that shrunken catatonic look. Somehow I had to get him into Holland. If I failed, they would send him back to Peking or, worse, to prison. I was amazed that I had not seen all this before, and I was trying to get over my amazement so that I could get down to the necessary business of finding a lie, a believable lie, any lie that would get him into Holland.

"What is his name?" asked the large blond immigration man in the office.

"Chen Xian."

"How old is he?"

"Thirty-five."

"Why does he want to enter Holland?"

"He is on his way to England . . . To visit his parents . . . He hasn't seen them for twelve years. They own a Chinese restaurant in London." I paused to see if he would swallow that.

"How long does he wish to stay in Holland?"

"He's just in transit. We were planning to take the boat to England as soon as possible."

"He has no British visa either."

"Yes. I know. We were planning to go to the embassy to get one today."

"Neither does he have a West German visa."

I explained my mistake about the Friedrichstrasse check point.

"Are you his wife?"

"No."

He looked embarrassed. "Well, anything's possible."

"Look. If you could just give him a transit visa, we'll go to Amsterdam, go straight to the British Embassy, and get a visa. They must give him a visa; his parents are British subjects. Then we'll be on the boat tonight."

"I can't do that, you see, because if the British *don't* give him a visa, and we have given him one, we are legally obliged to pay for his ticket back to Peking. Why didn't he get his visas before he left China?"

"He applied for them. They took a long time. He had already bought his ticket. He was afraid that the Chinese government would take away his passport again. His friends told him that it was easy to get visas in Europe, so he left." This, at least, was true.

"Hm."

"He has a friend in Holland who would be willing to put up the money for his plane ticket back to Peking, if you would give him a visa," I said, committing poor Huang to some unknown expense.

The immigration man brightened considerably. "What is his parents' address in London?"

I had been afraid he would ask that. I went to the back of the room, where Chen sat in neglected misery. "He wants your parents' address," I said.

Chen looked up, half dazed. "My parents are in Wen Zhou."

"I know. Never mind. Give me your address book."

I opened it at random, handed it back, returned to the immigration man's desk, took a blank sheet of paper, and wrote,

"Mr. & Mrs. X.Q. Chen,
The Dragon's Delight Restaurant,
589 Seven Sisters Road,
London, N4 6LW"

To my amazement, he took it without hesitation. While he was on the phone, calling this address through to his British counterpart, I wrote the address in my address book and handed it to Chen. "Copy this into your address book quickly."

"But I can't write English."

"It doesn't matter if you make mistakes. Just copy it."

As I expected, the British did not bother to check the address. They simply said they would not let him into the country.

"He has been saving money for years for this," I told the immigration man. "The Chinese are very family-minded. All he wants is to see his parents. They're getting old, and he's afraid they'll die soon. If the British won't give him a visa, couldn't you give him a one-month tourist visa? Then his parents could come and see him in Holland, and at the end of the month he will fly back to Peking."

The immigration man frowned. "We should send him back to West Germany, but he doesn't have a West German visa either. They'd have to send him back to East Germany . . ."

"And his East German, Polish, and Russian visas have already expired," I said. "He has been ten days on trains, he's very upset, and you can see for yourself that he's not strong." We both looked at Chen, who could not have appeared weaker or more desolate if he had been cued. "I can't go back with him, and no one in any of those countries speaks Chinese. You must understand that he didn't intend to break the law. He just wants to see his parents."

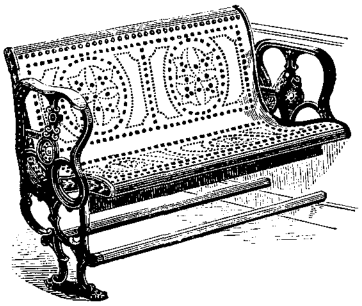
"All right," said the immigration man. "Call up his friend and ask him to bring the money here. A ticket to Peking will cost . . ." He ran his finger down a column of figures. "Three thousand five hundred gulden."

We found Huang's correct phone number in the directory and called his house. His wife answered and said that Huang had gone to Amsterdam station to meet a friend. We explained the situation, asked her to ask Huang to call us, and waited.

When Huang finally called, two hours later, and told the immigration man that he would bring the money, the immigration man called the Hague and was refused permission to issue Chen a visa.

I translated this for Chen; he broke down. He cried and moaned and rocked back and forth. "What will happen to me? I'm lost! What about my wife? My children? My whole life is ruined. Everything I have dreamed of for years is ruined."

I did not consider our situation hopeless, but I thought it would be if he became hysterical. I slapped his face and yelled at him. While this was going on, I was vaguely aware of the immigration man at his desk. He buried his face in his hands when I slapped Chen, then he called the Hague again. The phone call was very brief, and whomever he was talking to sounded irritated. "It's no use," said the immigration man, replacing the receiver. "I'll have to send him back to Germany." He assured me that as soon as Huang arrived he would be told where to find us.



So at eleven-thirty in the morning of the eleventh day we found ourselves traveling in the wrong direction. It was only a ten-minute ride.

A middle-aged German woman in our compartment was riddled with curiosity, because she had seen the immigration man escort us onto the train.

"Where is he going?" she asked with obscene relish.

"Back to Germany."

"Oh? Why?"

"Because he doesn't have a visa."

She peered at him with distaste. "Is he a refugee?"

"No. He's just an extremely inefficient tourist."

"Well. Our customs people will deal with him," she said, resettling her great buttocks and tossing her head.

"That's what I'm afraid of."

"We have to protect our own, you know. We can't have everybody coming to live in Germany."

"He doesn't want to live in Germany."

Fortunately this conversation was cut short by our arrival. We were met by a group of German immigration officials. The name of the station was Bad Bentheim. One of the officials spoke English. He was tall and blond with a reddish beard and pleasant green eyes. I was relieved at the sight of him, because the functionaries on the train from Berlin and the woman in our compartment had given me rather negative expectations of German officialdom.

The bearded official smiled at Chen and said, "We've heard your story from the Dutch. Please follow me." In the office, we were asked the same questions the Dutch official had asked, and I repeated the same lies in response.

After the routine questions, the bearded official asked a lot of questions about Chen's background. I interpreted for Chen, and the bearded official interpreted for his colleagues. Chen looked very small and vulnerable amongst these big, robust, blond men.

"Is he married?"

"Yes."

"Does he have children?"

"Yes. Two."

"How old are they?"

"Four and seven."

"What is his work?"

"He is a factory worker."

"How much is his monthly income?"

"Twenty-three American dollars."

"A month?"

"Yes."

They seemed embarrassed by their own size and health and the fact that it was their job to send him back to China or to put him in prison. They shifted uncomfortably and exchanged looks. One of them offered Chen a cigarette.

"Does he understand that by traveling through Germany without a visa he has broken German law?" asked the bearded official, trying to assume a businesslike voice, but his eyes were apologetic.

"Yes. He understands that now, but he didn't at the time. He trusted me, and I was mistaken. I was tired at the border. I didn't look at the stamp. I thought it was West German, and he thought I would know."

Because I was a British subject, I knew that they could do nothing to me. But I also knew that if I appeared to take the blame upon myself the bearded official would think me noble, and I thought that might help Chen. If the immigration men, both Dutch and German, had been cold officious bullies, as I had expected, it would have been easier to lie to them. As it was, I found it disturbing to exploit the goodness of the bearded official, and I felt ashamed when I saw in his eyes that my remark had registered just as I had thought it would.

"Would you wait outside, please?"

Chen and I sat in the hall side by side. "They're having a meeting about it," I said. Chen nodded.

It occurred to me that by this time, not having washed since yesterday, I probably looked a mess. I wondered if it would be better to look as exhausted as possible or as attractive as possible. I decided it could go either way, so I took my wash bag and went to the bathroom. There I quickly scrubbed my face and teeth; I did not want to leave Chen alone for long. I returned to the hall and brushed my hair vigorously. Chen watched in fascination as I put on make-up. When I saw his questioning expression, I said, "It might help."

For the first time since Berlin, Chen laughed. He took the lipstick and mascara out of my hands and dropped them in the bag. "Don't do that," he said. "You shouldn't do that."

The bearded official called us back into the office. He said, "We are willing to give him a paper which permits him to be in Germany for five days. His friend must give us the money for his ticket back to Peking. The plane leaves from Frankfurt on Sunday. The ticket will be waiting for him at the airport. As he leaves, he should give this paper to the immigration official. If he doesn't leave on that plane, he will be in violation of German law and, if he is caught, will be put in prison. The ticket will cost two thousand seven hundred marks. There is also a plane leaving for Peking from Dusseldorf tomorrow morning." He looked up at me.

"Five days would give his people time to come and see him," I said.

"Of course. So now all we can do is wait for the friend."

Huang had called us from Amsterdam at eleven in the morning. If he had driven straight to Hengelo, the Dutch border station, he would have got there by one-thirty. If he had then driven straight to Bad Bentheim, he should have arrived at two o'clock. It was now three. Chen and I sat silently in the hall. Opposite us was a poster showing photographs of various terrorists wanted by the German police. Three of them had been crossed out with ball point pen. I wondered what had happened to them. There was also a poster warning against bribing customs officials.

Sometimes Chen slept, curled up amongst our bags. Sometimes he just sat, very close beside me, saying nothing. We smoked a lot of cigarettes. The clock on the wall was large, and the minute hand jumped forward visibly every so often. I thought of the Chinese I had known in Peking, remembering times I had waited at an appointed place only to find later that my friend was waiting at a different place. I wondered about Huang. Many of the Chinese I had known were extremely loyal but disastrously inept. They would wait for hours at the wrong place. What kind of man was Huang? Was he reliable? Was he as close a friend as Chen said he was? Was he likely to turn up with an immense sum of money and effectively throw it away to save his friend? If he did not come, what would the immigration men do? What would I do? By this point I possessed one last one hundred dollar traveler's check and a large banker's draft that would take six weeks to clear. I was planning to spend the six destitute weeks with my parents. If I called my parents and asked them to send one thousand dollars, they would probably do it. If I paid them back when the banker's draft came through, I would have two hundred dollars to my name, but by that time I would be settled again with a new income. I hoped to God that Huang would turn up.

At four-thirty the bearded official came into the hall. He looked at the clock then smiled at me apologetically.

"What time does this office close?" I asked.

"Midnight. Don't worry about that."

"What time is the last train to Amsterdam?"

"They run quite late. If you miss the last one, you can stay in Bentheim. Bentheim is really a very pretty place."

I imagined a candlelit dinner at some quaint Bentheim restaurant with the bearded official.

"Perhaps we should call Hengelo to see if he has got there yet," he said. He called, and, sure enough, Huang had been waiting (waiting for what?) at Hengelo station for the past three hours. Presumably Dutch customs had not noticed him, and Huang had not thought to inquire. "He says he'll be right over."

By six o'clock there was still no sign of Huang. Chen was lying in the hall. His eyes were open, but otherwise he seemed unconscious. To get away from this depressing sight, I had gone outside. The bearded official had followed me, and we both stared at the end of the platform, willing Huang to materialize there.

"What will happen if he doesn't come?" I asked. Up to this point I had insisted to the officials that Huang would come. He might get lost, he might have a flat tire, he might stop for some won ton soup, but he would definitely come. I had persisted in this long after I felt sure of its truth, because I was afraid that they would lose patience and take other measures. But the bearded official was so obviously sympathetic that pretense seemed unworthy. He was touched by my confidence.

"If there is no money for a ticket, he will either have to go back the way he came, each country conveying him free of charge by train (and I'm not sure Russia, for example, will do this) or he will have to go to prison." He hesitated at the harsh word. "He has already broken German law. He should, by law, go to prison. But that would be inhuman. It is difficult, sometimes, in this job, to do the human thing. We try. We try to be human."

He was succeeding beautifully. I felt a pang of love for the bearded official.

Suddenly a jaunty-looking Chinese in a pale blue summer suit appeared at the end of the platform with the air of one who is just passing through.

"Hey!" I yelled.

"Ah! Hello. I am Huang."

"Of course you're Huang. We've been waiting for you all day. Chen is half dead with worry. Where the hell have you been?"

Huang seemed rather amused that an unknown woman should accost him thus. "Oh, I got lost," he said absently. He smiled at the bearded official and offered him a cigarette.

I dragged him into the hall to show Chen. Chen blinked at him without joy or recognition. It's too late, I thought, The poor man's a vegetable.

"Do you have the money for the ticket?" I asked.

"Money?" said Huang with a winning smile.

"Yes. Money. The money you said you'd bring when I talked to you on the phone. The money that will keep your friend here out of prison."

"Ah. Well. In fact I had no time to go to the bank, but I have a thousand gulden on me. Is that enough?"

"No," I said, looking at the clock. The banks were uncompromisingly shut.

"Never mind," said Huang. "I can get money from a friend in Hengelo."

Afraid of losing him again, I borrowed a map from the office and went with him. Huang was very chivalrous, taking my elbow, opening my door, offering me a cigarette, adjusting my seat belt, as if we had met under normal circumstances, taken a fancy to each other, and decided to go for a spin in the car.

"Today is my birthday!" he laughed, thrusting his Dutch passport in my face and jabbing at the birthdate with his pudgy index finger. "See? What a way to spend a birthday! My family are at home waiting. They've made a cake!"

I leaned my forehead against the window pane and tried to empty my mind, to think of nothing, to reach the ultimate Tao.

"Your friend the American told

us, at Amsterdam station, what had happened. You know, I *told* Chen not to come. I said, 'Stay in Wen Zhou.' But would he listen? No," he said, putting a cassette in the player. "I have lived here for twelve years, but my hair is still black, my skin is still yellow, I am still Chinese. What can you do?"

Despite a lingering desire to wring his neck, I began to like Huang. We drove over the border and into Hengelo. It was a pretty town, almost too typically Dutch. In the center was a street market of fresh fruit and cut flowers.

We parked in front of a Chinese restaurant and went in.

The restaurant was softly lit. The predominant colors were red and black. The background music was classical Chinese, a gentle melancholy *erhu* solo. Pretty girls wearing red and black silently served cocktails.

The proprietress approached us, hobbling on stiletto heels. Her hair was tightly curled and her body firmly corseted in a tight silk dress. She wore perfume and lipstick, trying to compensate in her old age for the ornamentation denied her in youth by the austerity of communism. She welcomed Huang warmly in Wen Zhou dialect. I was surprised. I asked the young waitress who placed a glass of beer before me, "Are you all from Wen Zhou?"

"Yes." She smiled at me. "You speak Chinese! Perfectly! Wonderfully! Better than I do!"

Huang spoke quickly to the proprietress then sat down beside me. The waitress placed a glass of beer before Huang.

"Did she agree?" I asked him. Their conversation seemed too short to explain the situation, make assurances, apologize for intruding—too short for all the protestations that would be necessary if a westerner walked into his friend's restaurant and asked for one thousand dollars in cash.

"Agree to what?" asked Huang.

I sighed and returned to my beer.

"They have never met Chen or his family," said Huang. "But their son is my close friend, so our relations are very good."

How good? I wondered. The restaurant was richly decorated, but it was seven o'clock in the evening and there were few customers. Hengelo was a small town, and this seemed to be a large family. It was not likely that these people were wealthy enough casually to make such a large loan. I knew that Huang had his check book with him, but he made no move to write a check. I did not ask him about it, because I sensed that I had already been indelicate in asking about the old lady's reaction. Despite two years of living with the Chinese, I felt I was in a strange country where my rules did not apply, where even the effort to apply them was a clumsy intrusion on a culture and tradition subtle beyond my understanding. Huang seemed calm and confident. For the first time in five days, I relied on someone else.

The waitresses were whispering in the corner. They had overheard Huang's conversation with the proprietress. I could neither hear nor understand their eager speculations, but I noticed that they suddenly fell quiet. The curtain at the back of the restaurant parted, and an old man emerged. He was plump and bald, dressed in the same plain Chinese clothes that he must have worn in Wen Zhou. When he entered, the waitresses all lowered their eyelids.

The old man advanced slowly, clasping his hands before him in the traditional greeting of South China. When he got to our table, he reached into the pocket of his ordinary Chinese trousers and placed three thousand five hundred gulden before Huang, without a word.

Day Twelve

Today is the twelfth day. I sit alone in a fashionable terrace de café in Amsterdam. A suave waiter wearing one earring brings me capuchino on the hour. I am wondering what happened to Chen, how long it will be before I receive a letter telling me that he is safe, what will happen to his wife and children.

As soon as the old man gave the money to Huang, his wife began to fuss. "Have you eaten yet? You must eat! We have wonderful noodles. No friend comes to our restaurant without eating a good meal." Thus she swept away any thanks or assurances about the money. It had been given. No questions had been asked. They remembered Wen Zhou.

"Well I *am* a bit hungry," said Huang, rubbing his hands together and casting an inquiring glance in my direction.

I grabbed his arm and pulled him toward the door. "Really, really, we must go. They are waiting for us. Very urgent. They will be back soon and eat themselves to death. Thank you so much. Goodbye."

A young woman emerged from the kitchen with a plate of steaming noodles and shrimp on which Huang bestowed one longing look before I dragged him through the door.

"I'm sorry," I said, planting him firmly in the driver's seat. "It'll be over in half an hour. Then you can eat in peace. Celebrate your birthday."

We sped back across the border. Chen was standing on the platform with the bearded official, waiting anxiously. We all went into the office where Huang, cigarette clamped cigarwise between his teeth, slapped the wad of money down on the desk with a flourish. Chen leaned against my shoulder and began to cry.

The bearded official looked very pleased and relieved. He gave Huang the paper that permitted Chen to stay in Germany, then he pushed the money back across the desk to Huang. "It is too much trouble for us to change it into marks. Why don't you buy the ticket?"

Huang's cigarette nearly dropped out of his mouth.

"Thank you," I said quickly, trying to cover Huang's obvious delight, then I realized that was probably an inappropriate response. I told Chen in Chinese what had just happened. "You have five days, money, a friend to help you, and a car." Chen looked up at me uncomprehendingly. His eyes seemed smudged with fatigue and anxiety.

"Everything will be fine," said Huang.

The bearded official and I waved as Huang and Chen drove off. The last express train for Amsterdam was standing by the platform. I climbed on and leaned out of the window. "Thank you," I said, not sure how much I was thanking him for.

"Don't mention it. If you are ever passing through Bentheim again. . . ."

"Yes. Of course," I said, depressed at the thought that, if I ever passed through Bentheim again, he would probably not want to see me. Or perhaps he would. Perhaps he understood what he and I and Huang and the old man had done together. There was no way of knowing. As he walked back across the tracks to the customs office, I thought of sending him a dozen roses, but that would have compromised him. □

BARBARA ANDERSON

THE SUBJECT OF MY PAIN

for my therapist

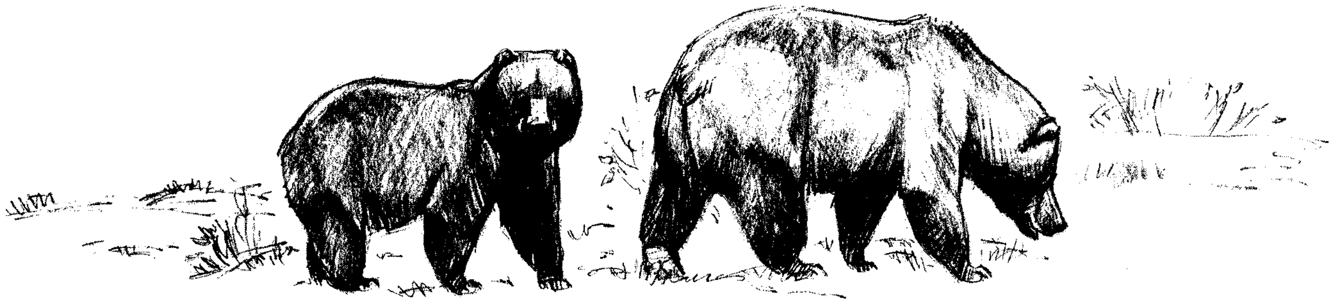
First of all it is not an object. I put my finger
on the center of an imaginary lightly dotted square
like a road map's D-5, parallel to my hip bones.
It doesn't smell like anything except maybe a place
where a rainstorm has evaporated on black asphalt.
My son's been there, but he was too small
to remember. We used to share the same symbols
for mountain peaks and time zones. He was smaller than a green fist
of space set aside for a park. We were healthier together.

Once I had a lover who said he could feel it like a spider.
His mother was a suicide so I believed him.
A one-car, high-speed, late-night accident. I held my breath
while coming. I didn't want him to know too much
about me, to peel back the fabric of skin & lace & web.
To know the exact spot.

I know you think I'm not being specific enough when addressing
the subject of my pain. That I'm not saying Dear Pain:
you are useful in my love.

I've done the other exercise for pain
five times today and it still comes out the same.
The right hand holds
all the good memories,
all the ex-pretty, the ex-years,
the mock-empty christmas gifts
department stores showcase in their windows.
The left hand rattles
the dull silver of the train;
the noise the pain makes
as it grinds over the track
can lull a race track loser to sleep
with only train fare home.

I swear, for a small amount
of morphine, for the liquor-slicked throat of anyone,
for the flesh and the light, I'd retreat into the tunnel.
The pain which is dedicated to me would perfectly fold
into itself, and we would both sleep side by side
like indifferent parallel necessary mates
navigating our way across the country.



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Paul Shepard
and
Barry Sanders

CELEBRATIONS OF THE BEAR

From time far older than memory, the bear has been a special being: humanlike, yet close to the animals and hence to the source of life. Like us, the bear stands upright on the soles of his feet, his eyes nearly in a frontal plane. The bear moves his forelimbs freely in their shoulder sockets, sits on his tail end, one leg folded, like an adolescent slouched at the table, worries with moans and sighs, courts with demonstrable affection, produces excrement similar to man's, snores in his sleep, spanks his children, is avid for sweets, and has a moody, gruff, and morose side. The bear is himself a creature in his own right, needing no justifying or compliance with human purpose. Try as we may, however, the bear's independence is hard for us to allow, for we cannot shake off the impression that behind the long muzzle and beneath the furry coat so unlike our naked skin there is a self not so different from us. He is a kind of ideogram of man in the wilderness, as though telling of what we were and perhaps what we have lost: wily, smart, strong, fast, agile, independent in ways that we humans left behind when we took up residence in the city. Moving away from his presence, we also surrendered a world view that held him in reverent esteem. The bear symbolized the harmony of society and nature, a harmony disrupted in the modern world, in a philosophical lurch separating man from his natural origins.

Yet our long association with the bear seems imprinted in daily language, religion, literature, folklore, fairy tales, place names, toys, plant and food names, even surnames. As a stuffed-toy companion, as a family in "Goldilocks," and as the forest ranger "Smokey," the

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bear remains alive in the popular imagination. Even in the urban doldrums he imparts feelings of vitality and strength, immediacy and exhilaration in the names of athletic teams. In his liveliness we sense a secret power, as though he were the embodiment of our *anima*—spirit, soul, or holy breath.

Bear myths tackle fundamental questions of human existence; they are a paragraph in the idea that nature is a language. Although there are other sacred animals in the traditions of the northern hemisphere—myths and ceremonies of the raven, coyote, tiger, elk, eagle, kite, whale, and so on—the bear has a role in human imagination for which it is endowed beyond all the rest.

The natural world frames the myth of the bear. Although that world is now removed from our daily life, we can imagine the bear in landscapes of the ancient north. As winter approached, all green things perished and the soil froze; except for the needles of the conifers, the leaves withered and fell. The sounds of frogs and insects ceased as the days grew cold and short. Many of the birds and small mammals vanished. With the snow, the pale face of death came over the world. The caribou and elk would dig for moss or dried grass, pursued in turn by the wolf and other predators. Men, too, hunted and savored the frozen berries and nuts they put by. The animals were themselves both food and teachers of food-getting, scavenging, storing, and pursuing. But which among them spoke to the season's inescapable analogy to the life of a man? Gradually, perhaps over many centuries, the human question went beyond "How do we survive the cold winter?" to "How do we survive the cold death?"

The bear, more than any other teacher, gave an answer to the ultimate question—an astonishing, astounding, improbable answer, enacted rather than revealed. Its passage into the earth, winter's death, and burial under the snow was like a punctuation in the round of life that would begin again with its emergence in the spring. "Spring" was three things: a season of renewal, the underground stream that came forth even in winter, and a "leap" from the earth. The miracle was double, for the bear burst out with young—birth and rebirth. Somehow the bear knew when to reënter the world again, emerging just ahead of the snowmelt, as though its very heat set the new year in motion, timed to graze lightly on the tendrils of the first skunk cabbage and new sedges. The rebirth was synchronized for access to the cold storage of the frozen carcasses of reindeer, moose, bighorn, and deer beneath the shrinking snow mantle. Clearly the bear was master of renewal and the wheel of the seasons, of the knowledge of when to die and when to be reborn. Of all the animals who vanish from the north when the cold winds begin to blow, this phenomenal retreat and rejuvenation acts as a clue to the greater pulse of coming and going. The bear's ascetic freedom in the den from eating and excreting, its timing in concert with the solar cycle, and the she-bear's meticulous motherhood are peculiarly visible and thought-provoking. The bear seems to die, or to mimic death, and in that mimicry is the suggestion of a performance, a behavior intended to communicate.

The tutorship of mankind did not stop there. The bear was a midwinter feast for man, taken from a crypt in the snow. Its entrails would heal a dozen winter complaints; its fat was like liquid gold. Men had a feast of meat to warm their insides and a hide to bundle in. This slaying of the bear was never an everyday event, rare enough not to become a harvest of ordinary food, yet frequent enough to be experienced by everyone. It was as though men were summoned by such a hunt, invited to intrude in the middle of the bear's cycle of deathlike sleep, to receive a gift of nourishing food and astonishing spiritual awareness by participating in its reincarnation. From feast to festival, from stomach to sacrament, the idea congealed across the millennia as a rite. Like all rites it referred to an explanatory, exemplary, wonderful tale.

The powers of the bear and its relation to man have been preserved in a story with two main parts, the first of which may be the most persistent and widely told tale ever devised to entertain and educate. Its details vary somewhat in different parts of the world, but the Haida version from British Columbia is typical:

> Long ago, a group of girls of the tribe were out gathering huckleberries. One among them was a bit of a chatterbox, who should have been singing to tell the bears of her presence instead of laughing and talking. The bears, who could hear her even though some distance away, wondered if she was mocking them in her babbling. By the time the berry-pickers started home, the bears were watching.
>
> As she followed at the end of the group, the girl's foot slipped in some bear dung and her forehead strap, which held the pack filled with berries to her back, broke. She let out an angry laugh. The others went on. Again she should have sung, but she only complained. The bears noted this and said, "Does she speak of us?" It was growing dark. Near her appeared two young men who looked like brothers. One said, "Come with us and we will help you with your berries." As the aristocratic young lady followed them, she saw that they wore bear robes.
>
> It was dark when they arrived at a large house near a rock-slide high on the mountain slope. All of the people inside, sitting around a small fire, were wearing bearskins also. Grandmother Mouse ran up to the girl and squeaked to her that she had been taken into the bear den and was to become one of them. The hair on her robe was already longer and more like a bear's. She was frightened. One of the young bears, the son of a chief, came up to her and said, "You will live if you become my wife. Otherwise you will die."
>
> She lived on as the wife of the bear, tending the fire in the dark house. She noticed that whenever the Bear People went outside they put on their bear coats and became like the animal. In the winter she was pregnant, and her husband took her to a cliff cave near the old home, where she gave birth to twins, which were half human and half bear.
>
> One day her brothers came searching for her, and the Bear Wife knew she must reveal her presence. She rolled a snowball down the mountainside to draw their attention, and

> they climbed up the rockslide. The Bear Husband knew that he must die, but before he was killed by the woman's brothers, he taught her and the Bear Sons the songs that the hunters must use over his dead body to ensure their good luck. He willed his skin to her father, who was a tribal chief. The young men then killed the bear, smoking him out of the cave and spearing him. They spared the two children, taking them with the Bear Wife back to her people.
>
> The Bear Sons removed their bear coats and became great hunters. They guided their kinsmen to bear dens in the mountains and showed them how to set snares, and they instructed the people in singing the ritual songs. Many years later, when their mother died, they put on their coats again and went back to live with the Bear People, but the tribe continued to have good fortune with their hunting.

In the Bear Mother story, men acknowledge kinship with an ancestral bear, yet keep the distinction between bears and human beings. The bear abductors, obviously alarmed about the moral state of humans when they hear blasphemy, assume human form. The woman is mated with a divinity, becoming herself a sacred procreator, and thus is involved with a form of immaculate conception. The Bear God dies for the welfare of people, exacting atonement and propitiation from the hunters. He becomes the archetype of all bears who will judge the spiritual state of human hunters. As food, the slain bear becomes a sacramental entity. The Bear Sons, themselves divine, can change from bears to men, share in both natural and supernatural attributes, and thus, as hunters, become intermediaries. They know that hunting is a holy activity, and understand the religious procedures of reconciliation between the hunters and the hunted. The tale shows why both bears and people are part animal, part human. Men are descended from the Bear Mother, who is therefore the founder of the clan and who resides spiritually underground with the Bear People. She is to the clan as the root is to the tree. When bear spirits come into the everyday world they wear bearskins. Men's luck and prowess in hunting are the result of their exacting ritual acknowledgment of that gift in the way they bring home the bear itself.

The second part of the myth, the Bear Son legend, which follows the adventures of the youths, develops later on, and we will follow it in connection with stories of the miraculous return of heroes thought to be lost. The Bear Mother tale itself reveals that bears are kinsmen: true forebears. It tells that men descended from the Bear Mother, a woman who married (and became) a bear and founded a special race of immortal beings—ourselves—and that men are part human and part divinity, since the Bear Prince she married was a shape-shifting, all-hearing immortal who knew and controlled the cosmic power of conducting the sacred hunt. Such ancestors should be referred to in honorific terms only. The Bear Mother may also be the first great mythopoetic mother of all life (the first external incarnation among animals of our personal mothers), prior in history and deeper in the psyche than her humanlike expressions, the goddesses and madonnas of civilization.

The story of the ritual death of the sacred bear is the cornerstone of a cosmogenic scheme, a tale of the secret of perennial success, and therefore renewal. We may guess that this came about among hunting/gathering peoples with the first intuitions of metaphoric thought. Much later, classical philosophers would concur that the idea of *thereutes* or *venator* embraces all searching, all quests for love and understanding, bound up in the drama of the hunt. The tale is given a spatial setting. In time the cosmology of the bear would develop a dual form in space, a horizontal partition of the world along the axis of the river of life and the people: its headwaters the home of immortal souls; its middle that of the living; its lower reaches the netherworld of the dead. But it also assumes a vertical structure: the sky as the home of eternal beings; the earth's surface that of the mortal creatures; the underworld as the place of the dead kinsmen. Just as the river unites the three realms in one dimension, the figure of the tree unites them in the other.

Earlier we proposed that the many dictionary meanings of "bear" could be collected under three headings: navigation, transportation, and transformation. The settings of bear mythology likewise take place in three realms: the sky, the earth's surface, and the underworld. In an elementary sense the two groups correlate. The location and movement of the stars is the basic guide to place and travel, the middle earth of daily life is where we encounter the bear messenger from the gods, and the underworld is the essential place of renewal in the endless round of life and growth. At the same time, however, each of the three realms is complete in itself and all three definitions of "bear" are represented as events in the legends that describe spirit bears and men in the heavens, the ground, and the nether region.

IN THE SKY

Reference to the "celestial" domain may seem strange, for the great, lumbering bear seems poorly cast as an aerial sprite. Yet the bear shines brightly in the heavens. As the two conspicuous constellations of the northern hemisphere, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, the bear occupies a significant position in the heavens. The brightest star in Ursa Minor, Alpha Ursae Minoris, is better known as the Pole Star, or Polaris. This celestial pole is the northern spot to which the earth's axis points. Ursa Major and Minor are closely connected: both are composed of seven stars, and the first two stars in Ursa Major, Alpha and Beta, are the "pointers" directing the viewer to the Pole Star. The Hindus called Ursa Major the Seven Bears or the Seven Rishis (Wisemen), and the constellation was named in Sanskrit *rakh*, which means "bright." Some historians conjecture that the Greeks confused *rakhtos* with their own word *arktos*, and hence arose the bear constellation and the bear stories to explain the animal's appearance in the heavens. In mythology, these two signal constellations are lumped together and both commonly referred to as the Great Bear.

Traditional symbols for the turning Great Bear include the cross and the swastika (the four revolving seasons, the four directions), and what might be the most basic of all symbols, the spiral. In his heavenly role, the

Great Bear, for some ancient peoples, directly influences childbirth. The Hindus, for example, placed red spirals on the outsides of houses where childbirth was about to occur, dancing outside the house—always circling it to the right*—to ensure that the newborn child would make the passage safely into life by turning in the proper direction out of the womb. Etymological connections between *bear* and child*bear*ing and maintaining one's correct direction by keeping one's *bear*ings are all deeply rooted in the bear's power of renewing the world.

According to De Gubernatis's *Zoological Mythology*, the Hindus believed that as the source and wellspring, the primeval whorl of all the energy in the universe, the Great Bear caused the "seasons to follow one another in regular succession, rains to fall, and crops to grow and ripen . . . it assured . . . a supply of food, but if it gave . . . health and strength, it also, as the controller of water and wind, caused droughts in season, and sent blights and diseases on evil winds." Keeping in mind the Seven Bears and the Seven Rishis of the Hindus, consider the following description from the *Rig-Veda*: "Those which are the Seven Rays, in them is my nave expanded." The Great Bear is the ever-turning mandala in the sky. Thus the Pole Star, called *druhva* in Hindi, provides more than mere navigational guidance—serving as the still center of the wheel, offering spiritual bearings for the religious wanderer.

Although the ancients knew seven planets and there are seven stars in Ursa Major, how the seven bears rose in the sky for the Aryan Indians remains a mystery. In the classical West, the story is less clouded. The bear owes his position in the heavens to the fate of Callisto, one of Artemis' virgin votaries, who becomes transformed permanently into a bear as punishment (or protection from punishment) for transgressions that are perhaps seen in the mythology as regressive, wild, or unchaste. At any rate, her behavior was unbecoming an attendant of Artemis, who, besides being surrounded by young virgins, was also the defender of chastity, young things in general, and childbirth. In one version of the myth, Artemis discovers that Callisto is pregnant. For copulating with men, Artemis transforms Callisto into her most familiar bestial incarnation, the side of her that is most unchaste, most unvirginlike—a she-bear. In another version, Zeus impregnates Callisto. Hera, Zeus' jealous wife, punishes Callisto by turning her into a bear; again, the bear is seen as the fallen, bestial side of Callisto. In both versions, Arcas, the son of Callisto, hunts his bear mother and pursues her to Mount Lycaeus, Zeus' sacred ground. To save her from matricide or as punishment for that trespass, Zeus fixes them both in the heavens as the constellations Great Bear and Little Bear, circling on the axis of the heavens.

The Finns, Ostyaks, and Voguls tell a story of the earthly bear's origin on a cloud near the Great Bear constellation. The bear came to establish the Barenfest ceremony, then returned to the sky. Like other bears since then, which are killed, its spirit was sent home by the ceremony that it taught men.

The Ostyaks, a tribe of western Siberia, explain the bear's descent from heaven in a different way. For them, bears began in heaven, born of a union between Moon, Sun, and Big Bear, a primal force or being. Bears lived solely in heaven, the story goes, until one day when Father Bear went out on a hunt, Little Bear broke the lock on their hut and entered the courtyard of heaven. An ungainly cub, his paw sank deep through the floor of heaven; and through the hole Little Bear glimpsed the people below. He was so pleased by what he saw that he pleaded with his father, Numi-torum, to allow him to visit the world below, and finally convinced him.

Numi-torum placed Little Bear in a golden cradle and lowered him on silver chains onto a honey blossom that grew on the noisy surface of the black earth. Numi-torum instructed Little Bear to leave the good people alone and to oppress the bad. He also told Little Bear to explain to the people the great bear ceremony, its acts and meanings. At the conclusion of the first bear ceremony, described later in this book, as performed by the Ket, a tribe of the Ostyaks, Little Bear fills his knapsack with silver as a present for his father, who raises him back up to heaven.

For the Ostyaks, the bear serves as a delegate from the world of the supernatural, the world beyond, to man. The feast of the bear is intended to make clear the connection between the holy places where the ceremony was performed and heaven itself. By enacting the feast, the Ostyaks ensure that their souls will wander to that holy spot where the fate of humans is finally decided. In a sense, then, their lives rest in the hands of the bear.

As for the "sky bear," we may summarize by noting that there are short-term and long-term powers of the sky over events on earth. Daily weather and the climatic changes of the seasons are widely seen as having their origins in sky conditions—in clouds, wind, the sun's heat, precipitation, and the association of these phenomena with the sun and stars' position, all signified by the corresponding behavior of birds and other animals. These sources in the sky of periodic events on the earth's surface connect and bind the universe together. Although bears do not fly like birds, their aerial reality is manifest in Ursa Major, a continuing sign of the bear's presence as a weather magistrate and prophet, particularly in connection with palingenesis, the power of renewal and the regeneration of the seasons. That same power is basic to the passage of the bear's own soul and its function as a spiritual envoy between the tumult of life in the ebb and flow of physical being on earth and its eternal pattern, exemplified by the wheeling of the Great Bear in the night sky.

The Eskimos tell an elaborate story to explain the origin of the Great Bear constellation. When the Eskimos hunt bear, they pretend they are hunting some other animal, for they are aware, as are the Finns, that the bears know what they're thinking. In the story, an Eskimo woman stumbles upon a house full of bears in human form. They leave their bearskins outside the house, but when they hunt they don their skins and become bears. The woman lives with them a long time until, yearning for her husband, she leaves them. The Bear Men make her promise not to tell anyone of their whereabouts, but her husband, curious, goes to find the strange house. The Bear Men know instinctively of her betrayal and angrily seek her out. One of them breaks into her house and bites her to death. When the bear leaves, the husband's dogs attack the bear. Suddenly, both bear and dogs burn wonderfully bright, and rise to the sky as stars. Bear and light merge for the Eskimo as a heavenly constellation.

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*The pattern of movement of the Great Bear around the North Star is counterclockwise, hence the spiral would seem to be to the left. But the point is that the turning of the heavens carries with it the daily renewal of the sun. If you face south toward the sun in the southern sky, its motion appears to be from left to right.

These two constellations, fraught with mystery as they turn at the center of the northern heavens, provide the essential and vital power for the orderly functioning of the universe. In this context the Great Bear functions as the Prime Mover, who must be placated in order to ensure his continual turning. Donald A. Mackenzie, in *The Migration of Symbols, and Their Relation to Beliefs and Customs,* argues that the pagan ceremonies of circular, ecstatic dances were "originally . . . performed by magic-workers to stimulate the Great Bear Constellation." Otherwise, he says, the ancients believed that the Great Bear might jam, or else spin in the wrong direction. C. G. Jung indicates that in Mithraic cultures, Mithras himself is sometimes the *Sol invictus;* he holds in his right hand the constellation of the Great Bear, "which moves and turns the heavens round."

The Winnebago Indians of Wisconsin conceive the transcendent bear in four colors: white, red, gray, and black, each bound to a point of the compass. According to anthropologist Walter Funmaker, the youth on his vision quest must "visit" all four. The black bear signifies introspection and "that forward looking associated with one's own mortality." It is part of the renewed consciousness of adolescence, the sensitivity that in all mankind marks the psychological readiness in the individual for contemplation of life and death, his philosophical entry into adult status and concerns.

When the first whites came to North America, they found that the Algonkian tribes already identified the same stars as the Great Bear that they themselves did. In time they found that this was true from Nova Scotia westward to Point Barrow and down the Pacific coast, and even among the Pueblos—though not every tribe knew the bear in the sky. Some, apparently, had forgotten. To the Iroquois and Micmac Indians, the Great Bear was composed of four stars pursued by seven "hunters," the second of which was accompanied by a tiny star, his pot for cooking the bear. To them, also, a group of stars above the bear constituted its den. The hunters were the robin, chickadee, moosebird (Canada jay), pigeon, blue jay, owl (probably the horned owl), and saw-whet (a small owl). The pursuit begins in late spring. By fall the four at the end of the line have lost the trail. The robin, chickadee, and moosebird overtake the bear in mid-autumn and kill it, the red fall foliage indicating the slain bear's blood. Perhaps the four that drop out are the same species that migrate away in winter, while the successful hunters of the clan are those that either stay for the winter or remain through the fall. (Only the robin's presence in this theory is anomalous.) The Cherokee Indians, like the Greeks, live below 40 degrees north latitude, and from their perspective the four stars were "lost" below the horizon at midwinter. The Cherokee saw them as part of the hunters, like the Iroquois, while to the Chinese and classical Greeks those were the only hunters, the first three stars being the bear's tail. (That this bear has such a long tail has led to speculation that its model was the cave bear, *Ursus spelaeus,* which had a longer tail than any of the living bears, and became extinct 10,000 years ago.)

As already noted, the connection of birds to bears seems at first strange, but is in part due to their similar roles as weather prophets and their spiritual dominion over the seasons. The association is ancient and widespread. In the Balkans, Yugoslavia, and Greece, the birds in antiquity were major calendric spirits. Water-bearing pots and vases in the shape of bear paws also date from the sixth millennium B.C. Danilo culture of Yugoslavia. These are marked with rain and storm symbols, indicating the bear's role as one of the oldest weather forecasters, a living almanac, a major celestial power in the Mediterranean region, where the rains occur only in one season. In northern Eurasia this emphasis is on waterbirds, focusing, says the distinguished archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, on the return of birds in spring. Among the Cree Indians, until recently and long before the time of megalithic seasonal clocks like Stonehenge and numerical charts of the year, bear hibernation and waterfowl migration were principal markers in the division of the year, "the basis," observes Gimbutas, "for models of a seasonal symbiotic parallel between the social life of men and animals." In the north country the disappearance of small mammals and invertebrates, like the fall of leaves and the ripening of fruit, is a sign of the end of summer, but the crucial onset of snow and the end of winter in the imminence of the spring thaw are most dramatically foreshadowed by the precise departure and arrival of geese and bears. In light of this shared oracular power, their intertwined presence in the stars is not surprising.

Much more fundamental and widespread is the belief that birds are the souls of the dead. The Evenk Siberians traditionally believe that one of the souls of a dead clansman, the *beyen* or body-soul, is accompanied by the shaman to the land of the dead—at the root of the clan tree or the mouth of the clan river. Meanwhile, the *omi* or shadow-soul flies off upstream, to the headwaters, where live the immortals. Mangi, the bear who is the chief ancestral spirit that controls entry into the lower world, discovers that the dead person lacks his reflection or shadow-soul and sends the goldeneye duck after it. But the duck fails and the bear itself goes to retrieve the *omi.* On its return the *omi* becomes a bird and flies back to the middle world of the living. The bird-souls are seen there by people, hopping around in the trees before reëntering a woman's (or animal's) womb and vivifying a new being. While in the womb the feathers drop from its wings and they become arms.

A different version of the cosmic hunt in the night sky which is probably older than the hunt of the bear, as told in native America, is the Asian description of the hunt of the spirit elk, Kheglen, by Mangi, the bear and chief

THE COSMIC HUNT

To realize what a great part of the northern sky was dominated by the great hunt, one needs to watch all night. Ursa Minor, Ursa Major, and Boötes, who make up the prey and pursuer, pivot around the North Star in the course of the night. The sky is swept by this great arm of lights, the drama of the chase from horizon to zenith, circling from right to left, dominating the visual field, awesome in its energy. In the Paleolithic era it was not Polaris but another "north star" that was hub of the revolving universe. The "pursuit" was like a great gear on an invisible axis, driving the whole stellar panorama through the night, bringing the rising sun, whose brightness was therefore also the bear's doing; the ultimate food chain. Hunters have always known that the chase liberates the energy that turns the world.

Although they agree on the nature of the spectacle, different peoples identify the players somewhat differently. Three examples follow:

1. In the archaic myth the "big bear" and "little bear" are the cosmic elk, Kheglen, pursued by Mangi, the bear spirit (Boötes).
2. In Europe the bear is not the hunter but the hunted. Along with the little bear, she is chased by the human hunter in the constellation Boötes.
3. To Algonkian Indians, the stars near the pole are the bear's den, the four stars of the bowl of the Big Dipper are the bear, and the seven hunters trail out behind.

Thus we have worked back from the Greeks, Finns, and Hindus toward an older, Paleolithic substrate, framed in notions of the hunt that nightly crosses the sky. The hunt is not a frenzied pursuit but the stately procession of final things, energy gained and spent, transferred, assimilated, and dissipated, only to be renewed again by the holy sun. Who knew better than those Paleolithic peoples (and bears) that food chains or some cosmic equivalent turn with their energy the great wheel of the universe? The bear dominating the northern sky as predator in one view, prey in the other, reminds us of its high place in the food chains on earth, hunted by men and yet an avatar of the forces that rule all life.

ancestor spirit. Linked to the base of the clan tree or *turu*—the larch—Mangi is also feminine, the mother-beast. The sky is the taiga of the upper world, where Kheglen and her calf (the stars of Ursa Minor) hide during the day among the thickets. At night they come out to graze and are pursued and killed by Mangi, whose ski tracks are the Milky Way. The cosmic elk is overtaken annually, at the end of winter, and with her death the middle earth where men live bursts into new life, the ice breaks up, the snow ends, the waterfowl appear, and calving takes place in the fresh green pastures. The new life springs from the various parts of the body of the elk butchered by the hunter-bear. The Siberians' early-spring ceremonies of the sun's return pantomime the great hunt. The dissection of earthly elk by men is ritualized so as to echo the myth of new life springing from its death. To some groups the whole constellation is the elk, Ursa Minor its calf, and the constellation Boötes, the hunter-bear. In that upper world the succession of day and night is produced by the chase. The path of these figures around the Pole Star is so much a part of northern life that the Soviet ethnologist G. M. Vasilevich says that the young people of today read it like a watch, and can tell the time of night to the minute by the position of these constellations.

IN THE UNDERWORLD

The aristocratic maiden who was destined in the trans-arctic myth to become the Bear Mother of men was taken to the underworld, the entrance to which was located on a high mountain slope. There the Bear People took off the skins they wore when they went out into middle earth. Oddly enough, the girl, waiting at the edge of the flickering fire to learn her fate, notices that the hair on her own cloak has become more bearlike. True to the rule that reality is reversed in the Other World, she "puts on" her bear robe upon entering the underworld just as the bear spirits put theirs on when entering the middle world.

This underground life (and deathlike state) of bears must have been one of the most surprising discoveries in the history of human thought. The brown bear prefers to dig a den among the roots of a great tree, and spends as much as half its life underground, neither eating nor drinking the entire time. The cave bears—and sometimes the brown bear—known to Neanderthal people used natural caves whose passages extended to who knew where. Black bears sometimes hibernate inside hollow trees, but usually go underground. If the sky reigned over the calendar of events on earth, it was nonetheless in the subterranean world that generation began. In the world of analogies essential to mythical consciousness, life begins and renews in *interiors*. Unlike foxes, mice, and beetles, which are also born in holes, the bear reënters the hole in a mimicry (or ritual pantomime) of death. Deep among the roots of the tree, whose trunk is marked by the bears in middle earth and whose branches connect the lower realms with the sky, the bear demonstrates that death is a journey toward the mother, just as birth is a departure from her.

Like the branches that frame the clan's tree of life, a profusion of stories sprang from this concept of the bear as the consummate master of regeneration. The bear became not only the exemplar of the nether journey that precedes new life, but the keeper and chief of that realm. Thus the bear is seen by many peoples as a bringer and giver of life, for the bear's body is itself an "interior." The Evenks of Russia tell this story of the bear:

> A girl, Kheladan, was walking and came to a bear. The bear said, "Kill me and cut me up. Place my heart to sleep beside you, put my kidneys behind the hearth, my duodenum and rectum opposite you; spread my fur in a dry ditch, hang my small intestine on a dry, bent-over tree, and put my head near the hearth." Kheladan did as the bear ordered. In the morning she awoke and looked. Behind the hearth were two children (the kidneys) playing; an old man (the head) slept near them, and opposite were an old man and an old woman (the intestines). She glanced outside; there were some reindeer (the fur) walking about, and the little valley was full of reindeer.

The spirits of the lower world are the object of the shaman's magic. His access to them is indicated in his costume among the Selkup Siberians and others of the north by bear-fur adornment on its lower parts. In healing ceremonies he makes contact with Mangi, the bear and chief ancestor spirit of the underworld. Thus *renewal,* like *interior,* has multiple meanings in which the bear remains a central figure. Our own interiors are also caves, inaccessible to the rational ego with its need for conscious light. The vestiges of an older style remain even in the conscious psyche. In dreams, the animals are as they were when they linked the dreamer to another world. We may explain their lively meanings as autonomous expressions of our emotional lives. Nightmares of bears, for example, are said to represent childhood and infantile fears latent in the adult. *Bar* and *gebaren*—"bear" and "to give birth"—are the German roots for the English *bear* with both meanings. Thus, says a psychiatrist, bear dreams come from the mnemonic trace of our birth. In dreams associating the bear with a mountain (like the mythical ancestor in Siberian stories), the terrain is the *mons veneris* and we are the helpless cub. The dream of climbing a tree to escape a bear is interpreted as a return to the tree of life or the womb; to be "bare" is to be helpless; hugging bears indicates homosexuality.

Folktales may be regarded as the containers of similar psychodrama. Thus, "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" has been variously described as an "internalized" expression of ancient ritual, a drama of oedipal conflicts, a tutorial of logical thought, and a formulation of anal problems. But what has become of the real, grumpy, shaggy, dangerous bear? Is the bear simply a large hulk upon which the infantile mind projects the human figure, and are we to accept the myth of the Bear Mother as the simple confusion of personal ontogeny with human history? No, says Carl Jung. Each night in sleep we hibernate a little: our breathing and temperature are modified; ingestion and elimination are forgotten. The bear, he says, is at the center of this excursion toward death's second self. Of this experience, James Hillman has said of animals, "To look at them from an underworld perspective means to regard them as carriers of soul, perhaps totem carriers of soul, perhaps totem carriers of our own free-soul or death-soul, there to help us see in the dark. To find out who they are and what they are doing there in the dream, we must first of all watch the image and pay less attention to our own reactions to it. As from a duck blind or when downwind stalking a deer, our focus is on the image, acute to its appearance, ourselves abashed, eclipsed in that intensity in order to follow the precise movements of its spontaneity. Then we might be able to understand what it means with us in the dream. But no animal ever means one thing only, and no animal simply means death."

The subterranean sleeper comes into our own time in a somewhat different context—in the modern expression of the "underground." Gary Snyder, in a poem entitled "The Way West, Underground," has called to our attention a different version of history in a countercultural sense. White America traces its roots to the East and the coming of Europeans; but there is a prior history. America was first peopled by men from Asia, who brought with them the myth and ceremonies of the bear. They themselves perhaps owe something to even more distant ancestors represented by the great underground sanctuaries even farther east in the Paleolithic cave art of Europe. Thus the oldest American traditions did not arrive by westward Atlantic crossings, but by way of Siberia and Alaska—the route by which bears themselves arrived in a series of evolutionary surges. Of this view, the anonymous author of the Bear Claw Press calendar for 1977 says, "The earliest cultures followed the paths of animals: hunters from the Siberian taiga tracked bears and caribou into North America. . . . In retracing the bear's ramblings from the West Coast back around Asia to Europe, Snyder's poem describes a cultural continuity as well, returning us to our own deepest origins. . . . It utterly reverses the European view, not only by reconnecting human destiny with its habitat and fellow-creatures, but by recovering the natural history of Northern peoples and animals, moving together across the land masses." From this we see that in tracing the circumpolar traditions of the bear ceremonies, we transcend the usual opposition of European and Native American origins, and that of Asian versus European, because the metaphysical bear legends are a shared heritage, perhaps part of the oldest traditions of mankind. This modification of our history reflects also our new sense of the bear as more than an external being—as part of the deep reality of the human self.

ON THE EARTH

From the time their ancestors first wandered into the forests and grasslands north of the equator, men have been watching, following, listening to, sometimes avoiding, and finally mimicking and studying animals. Myths tell of animals as the teachers of men.

The Inuit Eskimos, for example, think of the bear as both ancestor and tutelary guide to the food quest. They claim that their hunting strategy imitates the stalking of seal and walrus by the polar bear, who moves against the wind, crouching below the horizon, moving only when the prey looks away, pushing ahead a concealing chunk of ice, using rock or ice as projectiles, even covering its conspicuous black nose with a white paw. Elsewhere, men are led by bears to the medicinal herbs, the location of honey, or the wild fruit in season.

It has been suggested here that hundreds of millennia of attention to their fellow creatures helped to hone human intelligence. As the seasons and the hunt became storied phenomena, men saw animals acting in the drama of their own lives, key characters in the slowly rising conscious/unconscious structure of human culture. To this awareness of reality as recollection and intent, the marvelous array of animal life ceased to be simply *others*, and the species took their places as skilled and talented practitioners. Each in some way seemed to know a secret and to be wise in the metasocial fabric of the world, to be keyed by mysterious means to the needs of the hour, to the lunar pulse, and the season's passage. Being specialists—over against man, who needed something different from each in his own unspecialized way—few among the animals reflected directly the human situation, and fewer still seemed wise beyond its singular genius. For most, even as they came to be regarded as the tangible aspects of invisible presences, the animal gods were limited in their particular powers. The bear was the outstanding exception.

Why should the bear be so prodigious a model? From a naturalistic and perceptual point of view, there is nothing else like a bear in human experience: its humanlike foot and dexterity of forepaws, its tendency to stand erect, its binocular vision in spite of the big nose, its amazingly manlike anatomy when skinned. But its major qualification for viziership is a consequence of its omnivorousness, its versatility. It may be difficult to overestimate the importance of this one fact, that the personality of the bear is largely the consequence of a big omni-eater, the finder of whatever is ripe and the killer when necessary. It is the bear's broad, searching, persistent openness that makes contact with us, that flash of recognition in which men instantly perceive a fellow being whose questing provocation, whose garrulous, taciturn, lazy ways, even whose obligations and commitments to hunt, to hole up, and to dominate the space he lives in are familiar. The bear is a special model of human flexibility, a generalist set against a world of specialists. To paraphrase an old saw about the fox and hedgehog, the bear knows many things while the elk knows only one.

But the bear's similarity to man is not all that has so captivated human imagination. It is what he does and how man encounters him in the middle world of life that brings to mind his uniqueness, that suggests even that he is observed and eaten by men for a purpose. We may wonder if the bear did not seem to early man to be the creature who knew everything. Man's association of the bear with the river and the tree was probably close to the earliest act of human scrutiny, for it was the tree and the river that connected the three levels of the universe.

The bear has many watery connections. A Siberian story is recorded about the relationship of the bear to the creation of tools that is reminiscent of Australian aboriginal stories telling how the land took its contours from the activities of a giant. As recounted by G.M. Vasilevich: "The bear started to cross a river, getting deeper into the water—up to the heel, the ankle, the knee, the thigh, the hips, the belly, the navel, the armpits, the shoulders, the throat, the chin, the mouth, the nose, the eyes, the crown of the head, until he disappeared altogether. Then he said: 'My heels shall be whetstones; my knees grinders; my shoulder blades stones for trying out colors; my blood the color red; my excrement black.' Since that time one could find in the taiga colors, grinders, whetstones, and other things."

The bear plunges into water to soak when ill or injured, to cool itself at the height of summer, and to escape from pesky horseflies and midges. It is to water that the polar bear flees for safety and to which the she-bear leads her young cubs for their first seal hunts. Swamp thickets in the South are common hiding, day-bedding, and denning places, for the trees there grow especially big and their trunks rot hollow. Like his little cousin the raccoon (or "wassenbear"), the bear prowls wetlands and seashores, seeking windfall meals. Clear to the centers of the continents, the rivers of the ancient world teemed with anadromous fish, especially the salmon, whose annual runs were as tightly time-factored as the migration of birds or the mass emergence of certain caterpillars (such as the "woolly bear"). The salmonoid fishes ascend from the mouth of the river—that distant source in the sea or a great lake. Headed for the upper tributaries, which are also remote, they die, and their bodies wash back down toward the place of origin. Or, intercepted, they pass into the gut of the bear, and the elemental remains are turned back downstream. Like the waterfowl that follow the streams in their flight, they seem bent on a transcendental voyage, a passage in which the familiar middle world is but a segment.

The Greek bear goddess, Callisto, was said by Hesiod to have been a river nymph. Her other name was Themisto, her river-god father Inachus. Callisto's tomb was near a spring at Krounoi in central Arcadia, connecting her not only with a watery environment but to a source from the underworld. The bearish places of preclassical Greece were all near springs, as to the north where the bear-cult pottery of the ancient Danubians was decorated with chevrons symbolizing flowing water.

But it was probably long before anyone thought of pottery that the river was first perceived as a metaphor of destiny, the "clan river" of eternity connecting the three worlds. The bear signaled—perhaps seemed even to oversee—the arrival of the salmon. The salmon were human food too, which made the first link in the man-bear-river-salmon system a tangible reality. We can only guess how the river's eternal flow, the upstream movement of the miraculous fish from the depths of a watery matrix toward the almost ethereal springs at the headwaters, or their fate in the stomach of the bear might have stimulated the concept of reincarnation. In time, the spiritual forces represented by the physical realities would be grappled with by a shaman, who would travel the river to the ancestral downstream and the immortal upstream in a trance instead of a boat.

The other branching image penetrating the three levels of existence—the tree—also had natural bearish connections. In the south, from China to the state of Georgia in the United States, bears are born in hollow trees and crawl back into them to sleep, to hibernate, or to elude pursuers. Little bears scamper up trees for safety. All species except the polar bear can and do climb trees. Willow and alder buds, like fruits and nuts, are sought as food. The underbark or cambium of fir and spruce is widely eaten. The forest is the bear's cover; out of it or deprived of it, its habits are altered: he travels by barrancas and gullies or between moraines, becomes more strictly nocturnal, or gets gruff and aggressive toward intruding people rather than stealthily evasive.

Again, in all of this, the bear seems to be a guide for men. We will never know whether men simply discovered that they and it lived parallel lives or, taking note of the bear's example, sought out the same forest resources. But in oral tradition it is said to be the latter. Even man's use of wood as fuel for his fire came to be linked to the bear's celestial role, as its pursuit of the cosmic elk around Polaris keeps the wheel of the universe turning and brings the daily return of the sun's heavenly fire.

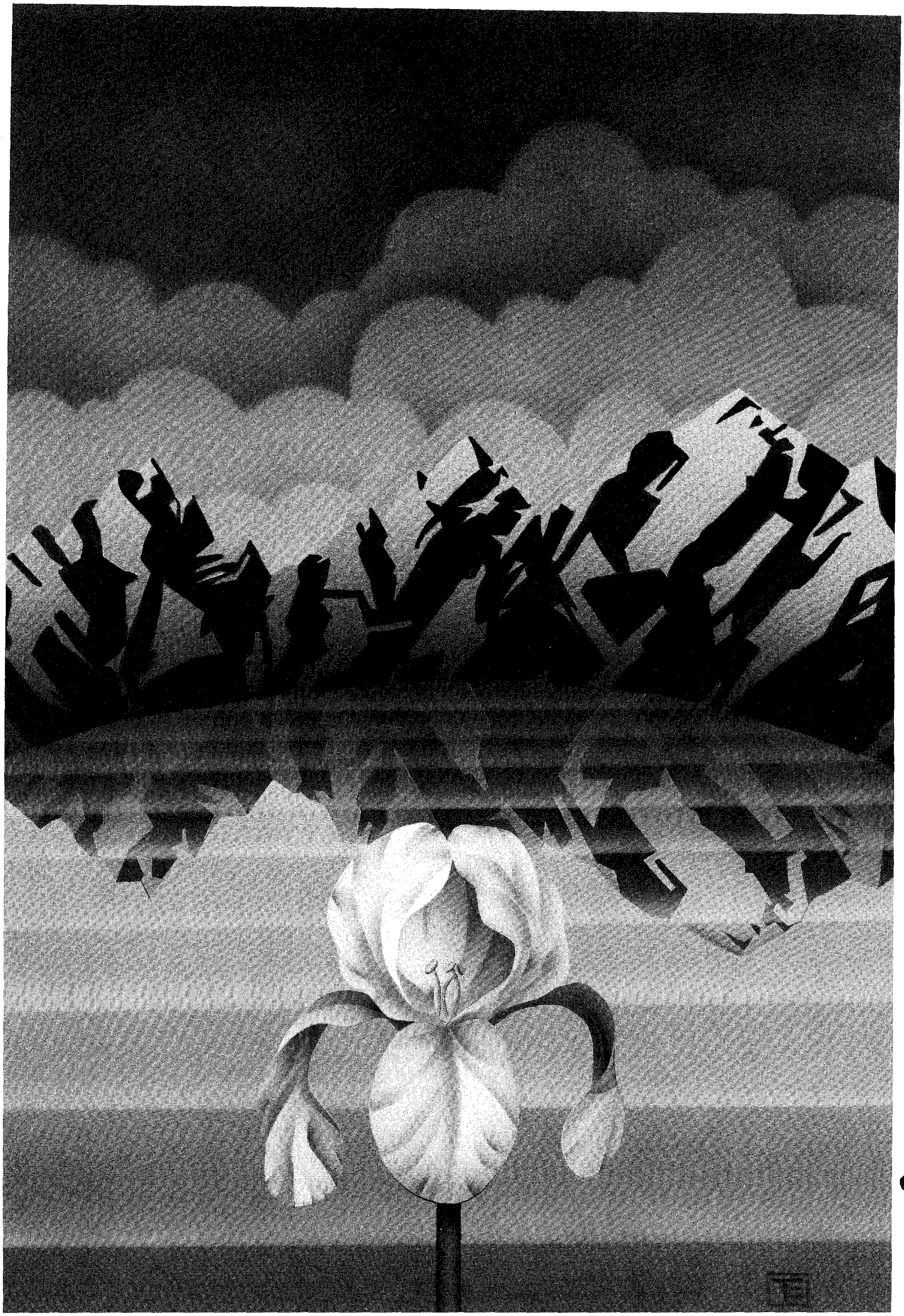
A Prometheus-like story of the Ainu tells how the bear obtained fire. In mountainous, volcanic countries like Japan, the forest home of the Animal Chief and the Bear People is in the mountains. The bear's association with the underworld makes him knowledgeable of the fire inside the earth, and his solar connections are implicit in the sun's control of the season and denning. Among several Siberian tribes, the bear ceremony includes a procession in which the bones are carried around the fire in a solar pattern.

Perhaps the most telling connection between bears and trees, from the standpoint of human imagination, is the ursine habit of "signing." Pandas spray their urine directly on trees, like some cats; Balkan brown bears have been seen to roll in their urine and rub their backs on trees. Even without the urine, bears' rubbing-trees are familiar to naturalists, and certain trees are used regularly. The bears appear to be scratching—but is that all? Even if such itch-posts are not being deliberately marked, there can be little doubt that other bears, all animals with keen noses, will take note of the scent, when passing, perhaps for days or weeks.

Bears also reach up, while standing on their back legs, and scratch hemlock, spruce, fir, and pine trees. Individual trees are scratched again and again over a period of years. What the bear is doing, within his own sphere, is unknown, but it is clear to the human observer that few other animals in the northern hemisphere other than themselves could make so striking a five-fingered print. Other than the bear, perhaps only the big cats give the impression of making a meaningful mark on a tree.

While the bear is certainly not always part of the worldwide mythology of the tree of life, of knowledge, or of good and evil, in the northern hemisphere it is widely and intimately a part of that imagery and story. The tree is a nearly universal symbol of renewal and the yin/yang relationship of life and death. In the bear the tree has a metaphysical symbiotic partner, a companion in the art of immortality. The bear, like the tree, seems to die but, in the spring, is discovered not to have died. And so it is said that, even when killed, it does not truly die. Like the tree, with its roots, trunk, and limbs in different layers of the cosmos, the bear is seen in the stars in the night sky, underground as the sleeper, and on earth as an animal. Yet there is a sense in which there is but one bear, even on earth. William Gronbech, a Danish historian of religion, early in this century, said, "When the animal steps out of our view we fancy that it trails a line of existence somewhere hidden among the thousand things of the earth until it reappears across our path. . . . The universe is crossed by millions and millions of threads, each one spun by an isolated individual. According to primitive experience, the facts arrange themselves into a different pattern. All bears are the same soul, and every new appearance of a bear—whether it be no other than that we saw yesterday or the most distant of all among the kin, as we reckon—is a new creation from the soul. A bear is a new birth every time it appears anew, for the deep connection in the existence of the soul is a steady power of regeneration."

Gronbech's observation clarifies a remark made by a Mistassini Cree Indian in a film made by the Canadian Film Board in 1973: "If we do not show respect for the bear when we kill him, he will not return." Thus the bear's capacity for renewal is based on a soul that outlasts death. Among the Siberians, who developed this concept to an elegant degree, the bear has four or five souls (in female and male respectively) that have different destinies and associations with the body. One of the crucial elements in the soul's return is the recognition by those who attend its death that they play a part in its renewal as well. Such was the nature of the instructions given to his children by the Bear Chief husband of the Bear Mother in the traditional story. Other animals have also tutored men in this matter, according to other stories, and all of them have in common the physical capacity to survive disintegration: the butterfly, who is totally transformed from the caterpillar; the snake, whose phallic shape and vaginal rippling movement combine with skin-shedding; the frog, changing from tadpole in the water to adult on land; the beetle, turning a ball of dung into new life. In all cases two things are true: translated into human life, such symbolic passage must be ritually framed—that is, elements of the story that associates them with men must be enacted or artistically revivified; and the passage from life to death has something fundamental in common with all transformations—birth, puberty, marriage, new social status or rank, and death. □



TIMOTHY EARP

BIG DOG

A Short Story by Norman Lavers

She of course wanted the old villa about five miles out of town, surrounded by lantana and bougainvillea, with its quaint patio and tile roof through which, in places, you could see the metallic blue Mediterranean sky. He looked at the plumbing, the improvised electric wiring, the inconvenient distance from the shops—"We'll have our bikes," she said. "Winter, wet and rainy, is coming even here," he said—and gave a decisive negative. He wanted the brand new apartment on the fourth floor in the middle of town, everything working, right in the center of things. She saw the sterile functionalism, the cool anonymous neighbors, the lack of anything alive and growing, and in her own passive way dug in her heels. She apologetically asked, he abruptly demanded, that the real estate agent show them something else, and they compromised on an older, more lived-in apartment on the edge of town with fields and a lagoon to look at off their balcony, which was only one floor up from the ground. Also, they were childless, and she had noticed a frail elderly couple in the little house next door. Her curiously inverted maternal instinct always needed old people to protect and preserve.

He for his part—well—he didn't know what he was going to do, only that, when he found it, he would rush at it head first, and it would not long resist him. Some people in this world are dreamers, sleeping light and dreaming through the night, half awake by day, their dreams rushing in at every odd moment. For such people—she was a bit like this—the place is only partly important, because so much of their life goes on independently from place. He was the other way, constantly fully alert, taking in everything, obsessively seeing and learning every process around him at the top of his speed, putting all of himself into it. But it had to be the *it* that was objectively out there, and when it was not there for him, and his interest flagged, he was deeply asleep in a moment, his face sagging, his mouth drooped open. In this way he was like those sharks who must swim constantly their whole life, because if they pause, the oxygen is no longer carried past their breathing apparatus, and they die.

But the doctor had ordered him to rest, and he had taken the long overdue sabbatical. He meant to rest, however, one hundred percent. He laid out the campaign in his head. He had first of all quit smoking cold turkey, and after reading every book, had set up a balanced diet for himself that would work off his extra sixty pounds. He would go down to the beach and do distance swimming in the morning as long as the weather stayed warm—it was already the end of September—and he had bought a knife-thin racing bike for distance biking in the afternoon till he had lost his extra weight, at which time the doctor told him he could begin running. Right now the weight would be too much strain on his knees.

On the day they looked at their apartment, clouds covered the distant view. But on the day they moved into it from their hotel it was clear. They did their grocery shopping, haltingly in the unfamiliar language—and she made them their first pot of tea, and they sat out on their balcony, and at that point for the first time realized that it was the mountain that would dominate their view. It was Puig Major, rising 6000 feet straight up out of the sea. In the local island dialect Puig was pronounced like Pooch, so he dubbed the mountain Big Dog. It was a bare pinnacle of rock. She decided it was a volcanic spewing, magma pressing up from the dark middle of the world. He saw in it another—to him even more dramatic—orogenetic force, the great African plate pressing north into the Eurasian plate, pushing and squeezing up the land between this wrinkle which went from the Atlas mountains in Morocco the length of the western Mediterranean at last curving northward and culminating in the Alps.

"What are you going to do?" he said.

"For the rest of my life?" she said. "For this year? Or just this morning?"

"Those three in that order."

"I'm just going to go on puttering for my life. For this year I want to do some different kind of painting, but I don't know what yet. And for this morning I'm going to lie on the beach with my new bikini. I'll be the one you don't notice because I'll still have my top on. And you're coming too. This is vacation, rest, change. You're going to lie on the beach and take it easy on your heart."

"My heart is okay."

"Now. But you're in the number one risk category."

"Yeah, well there's another side to that equation. More and more evidence is coming in that there is also a number one risk cancer personality, and that's marked by people who are too passive."

"I'm not too passive."

"Only because I keep agitating you."

"Well, if I keep pulling you back, it's for your own good."

"Hey, stop pushing me around," he said, smiling and she smiled too, both because it was so unusual for her to be assertive in anything, and because on the face of it the idea was so ludicrous. She had never weighed over ninety pounds. He wasn't tall, but he was broad as a door, and had gone to university on football scholarships till he got a head injury and began passing out. Then to the amazement of his jock friends, he went on and made it through academically, even through the PhD, and taught in a university with surprising brilliance. He took his first chance to move to a department chairmanship, and then to a Dean of Arts and Sciences position. No matter where he was, he systematically set about learning his and everyone else's job, then began working on ways to improve them, and by the time he had made himself indispensable, was beginning to get bored.

They were funny to see together on the beach. She was like his child with her tiny perfect body. When he put suntan lotion on her, one of his hands could cover her whole back. His stomach was big, but his chest was massive.

"I'm going for a swim."

"I'm going to lie here and soak up the sun."

He marched out into the sea up to his knees. At the farthest end of the harbor, two or three miles away, was the last out ship channel marker. He dove in with an immense splash and struck out towards it. He was so buoyant he seemed to wallow at the surface, rolling from side to side with his formless but powerful crawl stroke. He did not let up his pace till he reached the marker. There, he held on for a few minutes, breathing hard, and waited, but nothing struck his heart. He swam back at a somewhat more leisurely pace, and walked out onto the beach, water streaming off his shaggy body, his muscles pumped up to even more herculean proportions.

He lay down next to her and watched the topless bathers for a while, then watched all the people on the beach one after the other, trying to guess about their lives from what they looked like. He watched the windsurfers for a while, but that didn't seem very challenging.

"I can't stand lying here doing nothing," he said.

They went back to the apartment and had lunch and she went on sunbathing on the balcony, this time with no bikini. He liked that and watched her for a while, and then they made love. Once when they were staying with friends they had been making love in the guest bedroom when they realized there was a long mirror beside the bed. They looked over and saw the huge hairy monster with the tiny fragile child engulfed under him, and they both laughed so hard they had to stop what they were doing. But luckily for the most part they made love with their eyes closed, and it was the one thing he did gently, and she did fiercely.

When he stood up, the mountain was there in his view. He rode his bike up as high as the road went, chained it to a tree, and climbed to the top of the mountain. He looked around and saw water on all sides. "So much for that," he said, and was back at the flat in time to fix a drink before dinner.

"This island might start getting a bit small," he said. And while she watched him, his attention lapsed, and his eyes lost focus, and his face sagged in the direction of gravity. It was the end of their first day in the apartment.

However, he threw himself into his study of the language. He was fascinated to see how logical it was, how efficient. How by merely changing *a* to *e* in the verb paradigms they could be made to reflect action from a different perspective. He would study a particular point of grammar all morning, wandering around the house muttering, then in the afternoon he would walk downtown and try to talk to a newsagent, to a shopkeeper, working everything they said around so that he could use that particular point of grammar. He bought a tiny tape recorder which he kept in his pocket where it couldn't be seen, and recorded conversations, then played them over and over again when he got back to the apartment, analyzing them. He saw the ad, taped to a shop window, for a group of language tutors, and hired one to come by every morning for an hour class.

She in the meantime in her very quiet way slowly put her stamp on their living space. She filled the balcony and every empty spot with pots of growing plants. The rather standardized furnishings in their furnished apartment seemed as if they would resist personalization, but with the tiniest shifts—the equivalent of changing *a* to *e*—she turned each area into something recognizably her own. Each meal she fixed was individual and beautiful to look at, the local food and dishes given a slightly oriental quality. She had gone to Japan one summer to study painting and was delighted to find a whole country just her size, and designed and organized the way she designed and organized a meal or a room. She had studied Japanese for several months before going over, and he told her it was the perfect language for her, as it seemed to consist of dozens of ways of apologizing for your presence.

He was not by any means blind to the small and perfect beauty always surrounding her, and that he himself sat in somewhat jarringly, but no longer uneasily. He liked it. Maybe she could extend her subtle power to him, and make him, within her magic circle, somewhat less gross and incongruous. She seemed to think it was no problem.

"You mean strength matters too, not just beauty."

"Not exactly," she said. "I mean they're not different. My painting master showed me a very old painting. There were three figures. Quite intentionally, I'm sure, there was no attempt to make the composition interesting. It was just three forms, all the same size, placed equidistant across the board they were painted on. One was a peony, traditionally epitomizing beauty, but that only lasts for a day. The next was a lion, incredible strength and fearlessness and vitality. The third was a rock, perdurable, resistless, eternal."

"And they all belonged in the same painting."

"More than that. They were all the same shape. If you squinted your eyes slightly—"

"So you would see them as an oriental would."

"Yes, I hadn't thought of that—you would see that the stone really looked very much like the peony, the peony like the lion, and so on. That what was perfect in the flower was enduring, that what was beautiful in the stone was transitory, that the lion's strength was as fragile, his courage as perfect—you could probably say this all better than I can."

"No. I think I understand," he said. It was her he couldn't fathom. She was the one process he couldn't analyze, had given up trying to, which is why perhaps he never grew bored with her.

He thought he had dismissed the mountain after the first day, and yet as he paced through the apartment muttering hypothetical conversations, at the end of his pace he was always on the balcony looking at Big Dog.

"It's never the same twice," he said.

"Have you just noticed that?" she said.

Now he also noticed what she was doing. She had taken out a large sheet of water-color paper and with a pencil and a straight-edge was lightly platting it out in 2½ inch squares. He sat and watched her. She fumbled hesitatingly through her life, but when she worked she was almost grimly efficient. Now she took an ordinary sheet of paper and cut a 2½ inch square out of the middle of it and held it at arm's length before her, and looked at the mountain through it. With her other hand she did drawings of the mountain, and when she had one that pleased her, she traced it on her tracing paper. Then she turned her tracing paper over and blacked the backside with a soft pencil. She turned the paper face up again and placed it over the first of the squares on her big sheet of water-color paper, and with a hard pencil went over the lines of her original drawing, so that the carbon underneath transferred the line to the water-color paper. Slowly and carefully she repeated this over each square.

He began taking an interest in the process. "You know there is such a thing as carbon paper, that would do the job a lot quicker and easier."

She ignored him.

"What you're going to do now is paint it every time it changes, right?"

"Mm-hmm."

"Now's the time to start," he said, beginning to take over. "There's a neat lenticular cloud forming over the peak. Here, I'll set up a chair and table for you."

"I have to fix your lunch right at the moment."

"That can wait. This is more important. It's already shifting."

But she went in and began preparing lunch. Partly, she was resisting having him take over. She could be as stubborn as he was. More so. In her soft but persistent way she could wear him down as water does stone. He knew this and felt helpless now, wishing he had not said anything. He had not meant to take over her idea, it's just that it had seemed like such a good idea to him, and he was already anticipating the pleasure he would have in seeing the mountain captured in each new view. He told himself not to say another word, otherwise she would not do it at all. Even as he looked, the lens cloud was lifting and losing its shape, and before he sat down to lunch it was gone forever.

In the morning when he opened his eyes, it immediately came to mind, and though he would like to have lain there holding her small intensely warm body, he got up and rushed to the balcony. After a night of high winds—the stormy season was fast approaching—the air was absolutely clear. The mountain seemed much closer, and the slant light gouged a deep black shadow across part of the front. The hard rock glowed in the sun.

"You should see it now," he said eagerly, going back to the bed. "It's the absolutely primal rock right now, no atmospheric effects, simply what is there, the bare bones." He said it as temptingly as possible, barely restraining himself from saying, "This is the time to start." She was not buying, however. She wanted something else for the moment and reached her arms up to him.

When he got up the second time a bank of cloud as solid as whipped cream was pushing up against one side of the mountain, and puffy clouds were appearing in a line above the horizon. He stopped himself from remarking on it, but she read his eyes perhaps. She went into the kitchen and began preparing their breakfast.

While they ate breakfast, the space between Big Dog and two smaller closer mountains filled in with solid cloud or fog, and a high overcast crept over the sky subduing the light, except for a point of sun still illuminating the peak, as if at the end of a gloomy tunnel. Then the overcast thickened, and the light on the mountain failed, and it was only a dull gray outline. The cloud system moved rapidly, clearing from behind them, and soon the sky was clear overhead, and sun covered the land, leaving only the mountain in a swirling gloom. He was in agony watching the changes, each ideally illustrative of a new facet of the mountain's personality, and each quickly lost. In the meantime she had gone out to do the shopping.

In the evening it went through all the same or similar changes in reverse, only this time everything bathed in fire, until at last the mountain, clear again, was stark and black against a sky like a thin sheet of molten steel slowly cooling and darkening. They sat long over their after-dinner coffees watching until the last spark was extinguished.

In the middle of the night he got up and came to look at it. The clouds had built up again and all outside was intensely purple black, except where reddish lightning flickered about the peak as if around the head of some monster about to be brought to life. He went back to the bed, aching to tell her, to get her to see it, but she was breathing easily, fast asleep.

The next day, she packed him lunch and a thermos, which he put in his backpack, and he took off on his bike heading for a town 25 miles down the coast, on the other side of the mountain, where he would have a different view of it. The wind had shifted direction and was coming from the mountain, and thunderheads were building behind it. He didn't bother to take a raincoat. He only had on a tee-shirt, shorts, and sneakers, so it didn't matter if he got wet. He headed down the coast road, his huge legs pumping into the wind, his eyes squinted against the dust. When he reached the other town, it was windy, but clear and warm, tourists heading for the beaches. He could see the tremendous clouds over the mountain and what looked like a dense curtain of rain heading towards the apartment. The whole storm system seemed to be generated directly out of the mountain itself. He thought of her alone in the apartment with the storm approaching. She would be worrying about him, not realizing he was clear out of it, sitting against a tree and having a cup of coffee. He looked at the apartment in his mind room by room and thought what ought to be done. They had had strong winds before, so she knew to latch the shutters and not leave a door or window open in such a way that the wind could slam it shut and shatter the glass. But they had not up to now had rain. He remembered a stupid design flaw. The flat roof of the apartment complex drained down a large pipe which idiotically emptied onto their black-walled balcony and thence out a small hole in the floor of the balcony. In a real torrential downpour, he estimated, that hole might be just fast enough to empty the balcony and keep it from backing up and flooding the kitchen. But, and here was a problem, there was a complicated grate fitted into the hole, which he should have removed as soon as he saw it, but had not. It created enough of an obstruction that it would stop the balcony from draining fast enough. He had not bothered to tell her to remove it in case of a storm, imagining that he would be there himself to do it. He thought of her coping with the flood, putting up towels against the door to dam the flood, bailing into the sink, and then he saw clearly the refrigerator with its electric motor on the bottom. Two inches of water in the kitchen—which she would be standing in—would reach the motor and short it out, electrocuting her.

Now he rode the bike with the wind and like the wind, his half-full thermos lying beside the road where he dropped it. Ahead of him the clouds thickened. Then he was over wet ground and deep puddles where the storm had passed, plowing through six inches of flood water in low parts of the road. The black wall of rain beyond which all was obscured was still ahead of him. Then he heard and felt the first big splats of water and in moments the rain was so thick he could barely see. To make things worse, as he crossed the edge of the cyclone, the wind shifted around until it was driving straight against him again, blinding him and now stinging him with hail, like shrapnel from the lightning bursting all around him. His broad body worked like a negative sail, an air anchor, holding him back as in a dream of running underwater. His massive thighs were nonetheless equal to any temporal wind and he pumped grimly, and, if such a word could be appropriate here, remorselessly. Then he had reached the edge of town, the rain coming with new fury, and turned up the side street off the front, leapt off the bike, feeling with surprise the sudden weakness in his legs, sprinted up the flight of stairs, threw open the front door and punched the off button on the circuit breaker box. She was in the kitchen, towels against the door, bailing frantically into the sink. The water had just reached two inches deep. He pushed past her onto the back balcony, reached down into the deep swirling water for the grate, pulled it out and threw it as far as he could. The sky was already clearing.

Time was passing, and if in her patient and dreamy way she might someday get around to painting the mountain, she still had already missed thousands of changes never again to be repeated. He couldn't stand it anymore, and rented a car and drove across the island to the one city and bought an expensive camera and a heavy surveyor's tripod. He was too busy to spend years studying art and training his hand to reproduce what his eyes saw. So why not get a machine, a piece of apparatus, that will do it at once, and more accurately than the hand could ever do? He felt in his pride of the machine the faintest contempt for the patient art of his wife. That was a bit mean, so he altered that to feel instead guilty that he was trespassing on her turf, or sorry that he would so easily and quickly accomplish what she was still only contemplating. The dreamers and the doers. Of course it was her idea. He wouldn't have thought of it. But that's always the way, the reason we need the dreamers on this planet.

Yet it was not guilt or sympathy he felt setting his camera up on its tripod and aiming it at the mountain. It was self-consciousness, because though she said nothing, and seemed outwardly to show only the most generous interest, he felt she would be judging him, judging his results by criteria he was not altogether sure of. He looked through the viewfinder, aware that he was repeating the process of holding the paper with the hole cut out at arm's distance in front of him. His was only a more sophisticated version. And though when she was doing it, it was all he could do to restrain himself from taking it out of her hands and looking himself and telling her just where to do it from, it seemed so obvious to him, here now that he was actually doing it from this spot rather than that, he felt the whole weight of her competency bearing down on him. He actually felt himself sweating with this new kind of labor. He began to understand her exasperation with him at times, and wanted to turn and say Let me do this my way!—when he noticed she was in the bathroom running a bath and singing to herself.

One angle of the mountain did seem to show it the way he most often thought of it, and he locked the tripod into place. He realized he had already learned something. What he wanted was not *the* mountain, but rather, the mountain as *he* thought of it. At any rate he thought that *the* mountain, and the mountain the way *he* thought of it, were pretty close. He took the light reading carefully—it was altering as he took it, clouds crossing, then leaving the sun—and pressed the cable release to take his first picture. Click. He had caught it. This time it hadn't got away.

Throughout the day, as he did other things, he watched the mountain out of the corner of his eye, and as it altered, he snapped it. She was at the table painting a tiny white autumn flower. The last picture on the roll was a several-second-long exposure of the sunset, which this evening was like a gorgeous swirling bruise. He felt it would definitely be the most spectacular. He had made a few notes with each exposure, describing the state of the mountain in a few concise words. He had a feeling after all that if he approached it systematically he would find that the seemingly endless changes would reduce themselves to a manageable few that repeated themselves. Perhaps a relatively small number of pictures, say a hundred, would tell the whole story of the mountain. In the morning he took the film to a shop that promised 24 hour service.

In the end it was three full days before he got them back. He had been in the shop a dozen times, his temper beginning to fray. But he smiled openly like a child when the shopkeeper, equally relieved, held up the packet as he entered. One satisfaction was that in all this time his wife had only managed to paint two petals on her flower. He ripped open the package as he was leaving the shop and could hardly believe what he saw. The giant mountain that had dominated his imagination for nearly two months came out in his pictures like a tiny pimple. Not only that, the colors were all wrong, much too blue at times, much too red at others, and everything he had seen as sharp and crisp was pale and washed out. The sunset was particularly flat and uninteresting. There was going to be more to this than he thought, and he set his jaw grimly, and went back into the shop and bought a big book on photography.

He read it straight through, and returned to the pertinent pages several times. He rented the car again and went back to the city and this time bought some filters to cut out haze and to correct color, and a longer focal length lens to bring the mountain forward to give it the magnitude he saw with his eye.

In the meantime she had completed her small perfect painting. The flower itself was blown and dry and unrecognizable, having faded in two days.

If things won't give in to your first rush, then you must be persistent and systematic. With an uneasy feeling that he was backing off slightly from his first resolve to record Big Dog in all its moods, he decided, for an initial objective, he would record it perfectly in *one* of its moods. He was so eager to begin he was up before dawn setting up the tripod. The sun, rising behind his back, illuminated the mountain before anything else, in a delicate faded pink, almost white, and it seemed like a fragile cone of infolded petals, until the sun was fully disengaged from the earth, when it took on the harsh black shadows and the glaring rocky face of its true substance. That's what he was waiting for, and he photographed it with his long lens to bring it up tall in the sky, crowding over the tops of the closer mountains, and he tried it with each filter, with every combination of aperture and duration, carefully noting down in his notebook which combinations he had used. It took the pictures a week this time to come back from the 24-hour place, but they were terrific. There was the overbearing face, the metallic sky, the strong relief shadows. He showed them to her, and she said Yes, that's it, that's really good, and the child-like smile was on his face. She had found a tiny winter flower in bloom, and brought a blossom and a bit of leaf back, and set it in a jar to paint. But the old couple across the way needed her. She had been doing their shopping for them—the old man's pension check was so meager, and food was so expensive, she had been secretly augmenting it when she bought their food—and doing a few other chores. She had started out with gestures, but had word by word picked up the local dialect from them until now they conversed quite well. But the man was ill, growing worse. His wife needed all her time to care for him, so she had been doing everything else, cooking, washing. After she and the wife got the old man through a particularly bad spell, she found her winter flower had dried out past the point of her being able to recreate it in paints.

For a few days he was complacent, but then he went back and looked at his pictures more critically. With the blush of newness off them, they seemed less good, compared less favorably with the actual mountain. Further, he could see now how sloppily they had been developed, stains, dust spots, small patches where the color was the wrong tone. He rented the car, and went back to the city and this time returned with an enlarger and darkroom equipment. He took more pictures, then blacked out the bathroom and went in and developed his first roll. He liked the instant service. The waiting had killed him. And he was absolutely careful about dust, and keeping the temperature right, and of course had made sure all his chemicals were fresh. He started with a roll of black and white, figuring after he got the hang of it, he would return to color. But when he showed her the results she said, "Do you know what? It's better in black and white than it was in color." "How can that be?" he said, but he was only arguing from logic, because now that she had said it, he could see it too.

He caught the mountain in a few more moods, and was at least moderately pleased with the results. He thought he was learning better to make the camera record what he saw. But there were calls on his time as well. He was becoming quite proficient with the language, and was now helping the budding language school—it had been started by talented and ambitious young students with not much money or expertise. Rather than using textbooks based on some professor's notion of the most used words and grammatical constructions, they had adopted his technique of taping actual speech in the shops and on the streets, and using that—the language really used every day—as the basis of each lesson. The school, as the tourists began returning in the spring, began operating profitably and gained a reputation, and they got a publisher interested in the textbook they were putting together based on their new method. He showed them how to set up records and keep books, drafted the English parts of the textbook, and even went with them to take their petition to the provincial government to be licensed as a corporation. So that very often the camera sat pointing at the mountain through its various moods, but no one was there to press the cable release. And when he did complete a roll of film, it sat for weeks before he had a chance to develop it.

He had not lost any of his 60 extra pounds, but nevertheless bought some running shoes and started running. "I don't know why you bother to get advice from people if you're not going to follow it," she said. "I probably know my strengths and weaknesses better than a doctor who's only seen me a couple of times," he said. "You don't have any sense at all of your weaknesses. That's why you worked too hard and had to see the doctor in the first place." "It was just nerves, nothing physical." "He said that your heart—" "My heart's okay." "Your problem is you don't respect anyone or anything except yourself. You'd think after you got that head injury in college you would have realized you're not immortal." "You'll notice it's my head I've gone on to make my living with. Your problem is you respect everything and everybody *except* yourself. You have no concept of how strong you are in your own way. And how good. You're like an angel come back to earth sometimes. People think *I'm* good, just because I'm connected to you."

There was certainly no way she could respond to that, and he took off downstairs running.

Spring was progressing, the weather clearing. The mountain, which had often been obscured behind clouds and mist, was not visible again, but the camera and tripod, in the way of everything she wanted to do in the front room, was seldom used, though he often paused meditatively to look through the view finder. They were still trying to get the school officially licensed but the red tape was incredible. She noticed he was beginning to eat more, a bad sign. He kept up with his running faithfully, each day running as far up the mountain as the road went and back. Most days now this sweaty shaggy bear of a man, looking even more ludicrous, brought back in his big hand a tiny new spring flower for her to paint. She was deluged by the bounty. Twenty flowers withered and died while she struggled to paint one. It might take her all day to paint one petal—and that was when she had all day to work on it. The old man was better, but the wife was ill, and this was worse than the other way around, because she had to nurse his wife as well as shop and clean, plus trying to keep the old man from sinking into depression. Then the woman was well, and both of them had come through another winter, the time when old people die if they are going to, and they were fiercely proud to have survived again. She had part of the day to herself again, and sat down to her paints and a tiny flower. He had taken a day off too, and set off running right after breakfast. She finished doing the breakfast dishes and came out to look at the mountain. The morning had started clear and warm without a leaf moving. But as she looked she saw a huge thunderhead rising up directly out of the summit of the mountain. She looked with her binoculars and saw it seething and pumping. There was not a sound. She tried to go to her painting, but in a few minutes was back looking at the mountain. The cloud rose ten thousand feet straight above it in the still air, solid as an iceberg. While she looked she saw a flicker of light through it. Trees only grew to about the 3000 foot line, so for the last few miles he would be above them, and would himself be the highest point on the exposed road. She wrung her hands helplessly. Two thick bolts of lightning struck the mountain in quick succession, jarring into it like fists. She set her jaw grimly, and went down to the garage two blocks from them, the one he always went to, and rented a car. "I know I'm just being stupid," she said to herself, but she drove like the wind. She came out above the trees and saw the lone runner near the end of the road several switchbacks ahead of her. The sky was black but there was complete stillness in the air. She downshifted and spun around the switchbacks, sending up a skein of gravel against the safety railings. From 100 yards distance she could see the hair was standing straight up around his head like an eerie aurora. He ran on, totally absorbed in what he was doing.

He reached the top of the road, the turn-around point, shrugging the stopwatch out of his pocket and raising it up to look at his elapsed time. With the other hand he was trying abstractedly to smooth down his hair. *Heart-attack, goodbye*

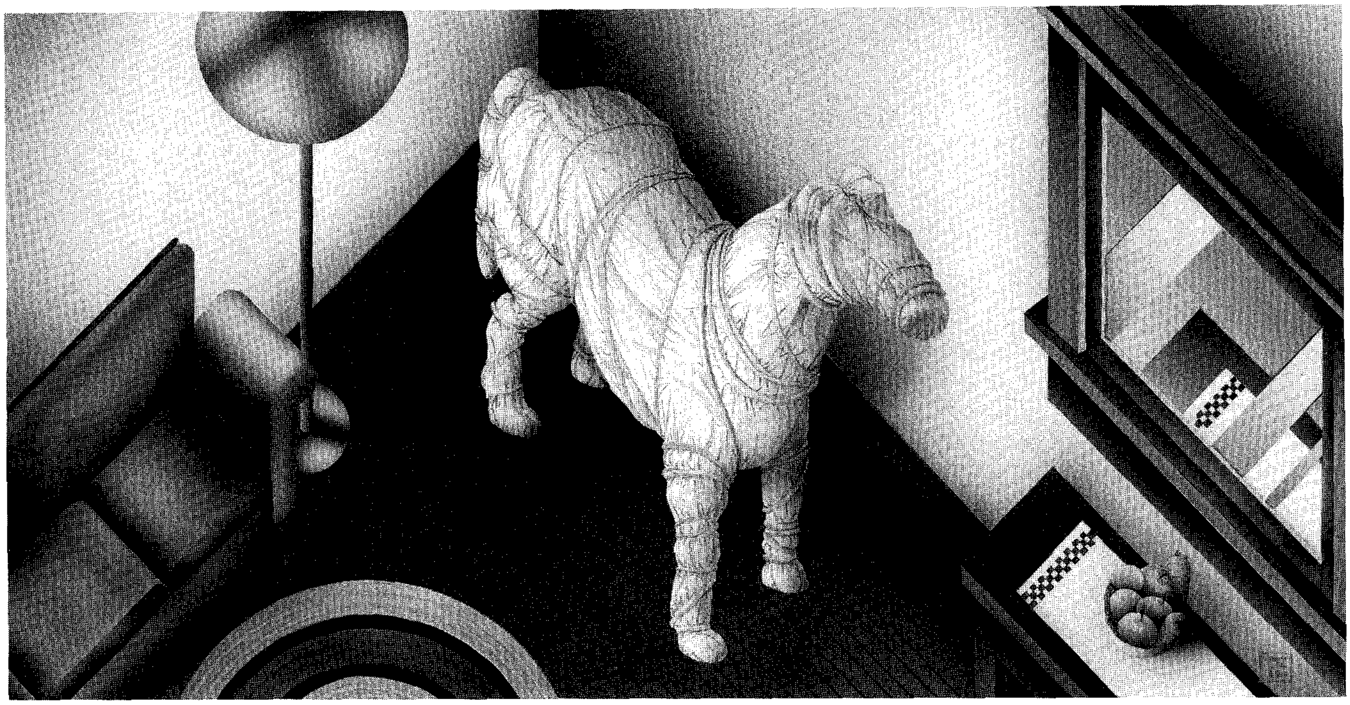
She didn't hear the stupendous crack of thunder either, she was too intent on getting the car stopped and getting out beside him, which she did in seconds, smoke still rising from the charred pieces remaining of his sneakers, a black after-image dividing her vision. She rolled him onto his back and put the side of her head to his vast sinewed ribcage. He was not breathing, nor could she detect a heartbeat. This was one process she did know something about. Because of the time she spent with old people, she had made herself take an advanced first aid course. She thumped at the huge chest, the defunct bellows, with her tiny fists, but knew that was not enough, and stood up on his chest and bounced her whole weight on it at one second intervals, and the heart, like a well-tuned engine, caught at the first try. Then she jutted out the sandpapery lower jaw, to open the wind pipe, and covered his mouth with hers, and blew in her child's breath as hard as she could, and again he took the spark of life from her, and was breathing. She has no idea how she got him into the car, only knows that the next day all the muscles down her side were pulled and were never quite right again.

In the hospital they told her she had plainly saved his life by being there at that second and knowing just what to do. It was a miracle, they kept saying. She began to find that a bit insulting. They found he had lost 60 pounds at the moment he was struck, body fluids simply vaporized, and every muscle in his body was shredded, and his calves and feet severely burned. He was already fully conscious and discussing with the doctor what steps he would need to take in his recovery, and how soon he could think about starting up his running again. He looked up at her, grinning. "You've got your nerve, following me around and thinking you know better than I do."

Everyone except him was amazed at the speed of his recovery. In less time than can be imagined he was back at the apartment, getting around a little bit on crutches. She gave him all her time, but he was very undemanding, a surprisingly good, obedient patient. Also he was obsessed again. This time, of all things, with photographing a plain drinking glass not quite full of water. Oh, he continued to photograph the whole mountain, and he continued, by telephone, doing some of the business of the language school, but maybe he had been just a bit chastened, and wanted to cover his bets by also trying to come at the whole by looking closely at one of its parts.

"You can't believe how challenging this is," he told her. "I must have taken fifty pictures of this thing and I still am just learning what to see in it."

She for her part continued her exacting painting of the single leaf, the single flower, but at moments during the day she let her point of focus come out a bit. She picked up her sheet of platted-out outlines of the mountain. None of the paintings took her more than two or three minutes to do. She filled sheet after sheet, her confidence and speed growing. She had been to that mountain, and felt she knew something about it. He had arrived at one position, one angle of light, that he thought was perfect, and he thought he was beginning to learn exactly how he wanted to develop the negative. By then however their time was up and they left the island. ☐



TIMOTHY EARP

GABON

W.P. Kinsella

I have lived in this massive, old frame house for four years. Only Gabon has been here longer. The house leans at odd, erotic angles. I'm still not sure that I've been in all the rooms and apartments. Multiple additions have been built on over the many years since the house was new. Some owner, desperate for money, rented a sunporch or pantry, and built on a new sunporch or pantry, which was later rented out by a subsequent owner. Years ago, the double garage was converted into an apartment. Later, a room was added on top of the garage, then still another room was piled on top of that.

A Mrs. Kryzanowski owns the property now, inherited from her husband, a hollow-cheeked, cancerous-looking man who cashed in his pale soul soon after I arrived. He had purchased the house from the estate of an elderly Chinese, who had died in one of the sun porches amid stacks of Chinese newspapers and three bamboo cages filled with thimble-sized canaries.

Before the Chinese, history blurs.

Gabon lives in the attic above the third floor. He occupies a tiny loft with one dark, triangular window that overlooks the back alley. The attic is reached by pulling down a metal ladder, which hugs the ceiling like a long, wrought-iron spider, and climbing through a trap door.

I'm sure Gabon's presence in the attic must violate thousands of fire and building code regulations, but none of us are about to call in outsiders, who, in order to *protect* us, would evict us. The rent is cheap; the house is warm; and each of us lives with our own secrets, which may be as frayed as a favorite blanket or as vicious as a Tasmanian devil.

Gabon is small and brown with bird-like ankles and wrists; his nose is hooked, and black tufts of hair bristle from his head at odd angles. I knew someone from Sumatra who looked like him: tiny, starved-looking, cinnamon-skinned. There is a sour, bachelor smell about Gabon, of emptied ashtrays and soiled clothing.

Whenever I meet him on the sidewalk or in the halls, he nods shyly. "I pay my rent," he informs me, speaking in a sibilant whisper, his accent unidentifiable: Spanish? Greek? Arabic of some ilk? I suspect he knows only two English phrases: "Nice day," offered even when it is raining torrentially, and "I pay my rent." The latter is delivered as if he is asking a question like, "How are you?"

The phrase must have impressed Mrs. Kryzanowski, for when I say, after counting twenty-dollar bills into her bluish hand, "Tell me about Gabon?" she replies, "He pays his rent." The expression on her pink, naugahyde face lets me know unequivocally that Gabon is a good tenant, and that she would be happier if I paid my rent on time more often and asked fewer questions.

"I pay my rent too," I say, trying to smile disarmingly.

"Sometimes," says Mrs. Kryzanowski.

But I refuse to be dismissed so easily. I stand leaning on the doorjamb, waiting. Mrs. Kryzanowski is wearing a ghastly, flowered housecoat; her white hair has incongruous lemon streaks in it and is wound around candy-apple-blue rollers. Her face is paved with makeup that may well have been applied with a palette knife.

"Noisy, noisy," she finally says. "A jockey. Broked his neck once," and she makes a cracking motion with her large hands, like snapping invisible kindling.

"Noisy?" I say.

"Walk, walk, walk. Ax-ersize maybe? Who knows. Everybody's crazy over there."

Mrs. Kryzanowski lives two blocks away in a one-story, basementless house with unlevel floors covered with bulging linoleum. She never visits the "Castle," as our rooming house is referred to by residents and neighbors alike.

"He has a *doght*," she volunteers, smiling conspiratorily. "He tinks I don't know."

Mrs. Kryzanowski obviously has a spy at the Castle. It is probably Grabarkewitcz, who lives in a room below me in the company of a magical cat. Mrs. Kryzanowski had Grabarkewitcz's room painted last month, the only maintenance she has authorized since she's owned the Castle.

A dog. Interesting.

Night and day I haunt the halls of the Castle, inhaling the odors of varnish, cooked cabbage, mothballs, and dust. Mrs. Kryzanowksi harbors quite a genteel collection of loners and losers. Tenants who disturb the status quo are dealt with swiftly. Last summer, a stringy-haired thug rented a first-floor room and soon had it swarming with beer-swilling friends who argued, fought, played a tinny radio at full volume, and urinated out the window into Mrs. Kryzanowski's caragana hedge.

One afternoon, a lithe Oriental with steel-colored hair and bitter eyes called on the thug and his friends. The caller was verbally abused and threatened. The young Oriental bowed curtly as the door was slammed in his face.

The next time the thug exited by the side door, there was one sharp bleat of pain, brief scuffling in the caragana, then silence. Late that evening, the thug moved out, his thug friends carrying his few possessions. The thug carried only a few soiled clothes crushed to his body with his left arm. His right arm bore a blazing white cast, resting like an angel in a clean, white sling.

I knew how Gabon reached his living quarters, but had never seen the deed accomplished. Like most of us here, Gabon had no employment and kept irregular hours. I lurked behind my curtains for two days before I spied Gabon approaching the house. I huffed up two flights of stairs and down a long corridor. I was loitering beneath the black ladder when Gabon arrived.

"Evening," I said.

"Nice day," said Gabon. He was clutching an apple in his right hand.

"It is," I said. It was.

"I pay my rent," said Gabon, again treating the statement as a question. Perhaps he had been misled by a deceitful English-as-a-second-language instructor.

Gabon nervously forced the apple into a side pocket, then, flexing his knees, sprang straight into the air and grabbed the bottom rung of the ladder with both hands. There was barely enough of Gabon — ninety pounds would be my guess — to pull the ladder down until the bottom rung was a foot from the floor. When the ladder was in position, he quickly scampered up the eight or so rungs, like a native scaling a palm tree, and pushed open the trap door to the attic. He disappeared like a burglar and the ladder swung eerily back into place, emitting a few soft, metal groans.

I remained in the dim hall for a long time. Gabon did pace about a great deal, sometimes seeming to break into a run. He also seemed to be talking to someone, though the words were indistinguishable, and could have come from a radio.

He must have been uneasy about his encounter with me, for, after about twenty minutes, the trap door creaked open and Gabon hung his head down and peered furtively around. I was pressed against the wall at the head of the stairs out of view.

Back in my room, I opened the window and climbed out onto the porch roof below me. I crawled about twenty feet, where, when I carefully stood up, at shoulder height there was another addition to the Castle. By pulling myself up and over two more portions of the building, and risking great embarrassment and multiple fractures, I was able to climb onto the roof of Gabon's loft. I slithered forward to the very peak of the roof and, by hanging precariously over the edge, was able to peer into Gabon's triangular window. It was a crisp October night and I was silvered by the moon as I hung grotesquely, like a broken TV antenna.

In the loft, which was lit by the yellowish light from one sixty-watt bulb, sat Gabon, not on a chair or bed, but on the back of a small, shaggy, brown-and-white pony.

Gabon, no larger than a ten-year-old, was dressed in jockey silks of parrot-green and ivory, a white-and-green jockey's cap on his head, goggles resting on the crown of the cap.

The pony was a bit over three feet tall. Gabon sat on a scaled-down racing saddle, it and his tall boots polished to the color of gleaming liver.

In one corner of the loft was Gabon's pallet. In the other, cordoned off by small packing crates, was straw for bedding and grass for eating. Gabon rode the pony in a slow circle; the middle of the room was covered with brown indoor-outdoor carpet. The pony pranced. Gabon waved to the crowd.

I tried to imagine Gabon smuggling the pony into the loft. It was too big to remove now, but I suppose as a colt it would have been no larger than a full-grown spaniel.

Now, on this brilliant October night, in one of the loneliest places on earth, Gabon parades around the winner's circle under the blazing sun of Hialeah, Pimlico, or Churchill Downs, accepting the accolades, remembering the clash of the starting gate, the yelp of the crowd as his horse lunged forward — sleek, powerful, pliant as butter between his thighs. ☐

TIMOTHY EARP

GOING TO SCHOOL

by Walter Sanders

Mother stood on the sidewalk by the curbing. Mrs. Abeck and Mrs. Flint and Mrs. Sweikert stood in front of mother and looked and listened to her. Mrs. Flint had her arms crossed on her chest and shook her head slowly from side to side as my mother talked. I heard Mrs. Flint "tsk, tsk" over and over with each move of her head. The other two neighbors listened hard and quietly. Mother pressed her legs close together. I could see her press her left knee hard against her right one. She put her chin in her cupped hands and stared down at the sidewalk. Then she stomped softly with one foot and pressed her legs back together. I couldn't hear what she was talking about. I stood by the corner of the house. I had planted flower seeds in the garden my father spaded for me the night before. Marigolds and cosmos and zinnias.

I wanted to show Mother the neat rows I had planted. But I thought she was crying. She held a Kleenex in her hand and wiped at her eyes. I wanted to help her.

When I got closer I saw blood running down her leg. She had on her sleeveless house dress which had a bold pattern of triangles and squares and flashes of lightning in green and orange and black and gold.

"Mother, I planted my flower seeds. Come see."

Her face turned red and angry when she heard and saw me. Her eyes were full of tears. The women looked at me.

"Mother you're bleeding. You're hurt."

"Get him out of here. Take him away. Oh what do I mean. Get him away from here." Mother sobbed hard the way she had done when grandmother died last winter.

Mrs. Flint brushed some soil from my hand and led me around to the garden at the back of the house.

"Your mother's just not feeling well. She'll feel better soon. You go weed in the garden. Soon your sister or your mother will come and get you for lunch."

My sister couldn't come and get me. She was still in school. The older children had two more weeks of school before summer vacation. It was the end of May. I was going to be five in August, and I would start school in September my mother and father had told me. I was eager to learn to read and write. I always watched my sister write her school papers. Sometimes my father had to write papers at night for his job. And my mother let me sit at the table when she wrote letters to her sister in Raleigh. I already knew that Raleigh was the name of a place and also the name of a man.

My seeds were all planted. I took small twigs and made banners with the empty seed packets announcing a row of marigolds, a row of cosmos, a row of zinnias. Maybe Mother would help me water my plantings after lunch when she felt better.

I think that was the first time I felt excluded. I felt sorry for my mother. I didn't want to hurt her.

I walked carefully among the neat rows of my father's victory garden. Peas I knew, and they were waist high on me as they twined their way among the fancy trellises my father had woven from white cotton string and hung from stakes. One fourth of the garden was planted with tomatoes. My father did that every year. He would give tomatoes to the neighbors who lived on either side of us. Mr. Abeck made ketchup. He cooked the tomatoes in a huge cauldron in his driveway for a day or more. The air always smelled spicy during ketchup time. I looked for the little yellow flowers that were the promise of the fruit I loved.

Last summer I had taken a salt shaker out to the garden in the mid-afternoon and feasted on the bright red warm fruit. Soon I broke out in hives and the doctor said no more tomatoes that year. This year I would be more careful.

Mother made a bologna sandwich with ketchup on it, the way I liked such a sandwich. And I had a glass of milk. Mother was quiet during lunch.

I said, "I wish you felt better."

"I do too," Mother said. She was looking down at the table, but I don't think she saw the table or me or much of anything in the kitchen that noon.

2.

Wayne and Terry played cowboys and Indians that spring with me after they got home from school in the afternoon. They were in the first grade already. They had let me play with them last summer after I got my holster and pearl-handled six-shooter. I told them I was Hopalong Cassidy because I had blond hair just like Hopalong did. I looked forward to a summer of fine flowers, bouquets for my mother to help her feel better and cowboys and Indians with my friends.

Wayne lived a block away, but Terry lived across the street. In June, on a Saturday morning my sister watched me as I crossed the street to go to Terry's for a morning of play.

Mrs. Flint was hanging up some washing on the side of the house.

"The boys are out back, Roger. Check in the garage. I think I saw them go in there a while ago. I think they're trying to work on a soapbox racer. You just go right in. If you can't find them, let me know and I'll call for Terry."

Mrs. Flint sometimes made cherry or grape Kool-Aid for us.

The side garage door was closed. The garage was way at the back of the lot. It was bright and hot outside already. I thought I could smell the damp oil-stained dirt floor of the garage before I got there.

Wayne had told me that he and Terry were going to build a speed racer with wood and a set of wheels that Wayne's brother, Harold, had given him. I had a car. It was dark green, and it had a steering wheel and foot pedals. But Wayne said that his super-racer would go down hills fast as could be, and he was going to enter the races in July and win a prize.

Pedaling my car was fun. It was a solitary activity. I pushed and pushed and steered and backed up and made a sound like a real car horn for no good reason from time to time. When my father washed our black Plymouth I wiped off my car and sometimes inspected the wheels and steering bolts. But driving was something I liked to do by myself. Sometimes I would try to roller skate with Mary Bea and Marilyn.

I went right into the garage. I was wearing my six-shooter. Wayne and Terry were standing facing one another in the semi-dark. Sunlight through a window lit the near end of the garage.

"Close the door, Rog," Wayne said.

"Quick," Terry said.

Terry and Wayne didn't have their pants on. They stood facing one another about four feet apart and started thrusting at each other.

Terry held his penis in his right hand. The light showed how hard he held it. For a couple of minutes the two danced around thrusting at each other and grunting. For a moment I felt like I had to pee.

"Don't tell anyone what you saw here, Rog, or we'll call you a liar and nobody will play with you all summer."

I watched Wayne and Terry work on their racer for the rest of the morning. I kept checking my six-shooter just in case. At times I couldn't even feel that it was hanging at my side.

They talked quietly to themselves. They talked about Terry's older sister and her boyfriend. Terry said that he saw him put it in her and groan.

Sometimes during the summer Terry and Wayne came to play cowboys and Indians but mostly it was War. They talked of Nazis and Japs and pulled their eyes into slanted slits. Prisoners were taken as our gang grew to sometimes six or seven. Sue and Ellie joined us boys and at first were often the enemy prisoners thrown to the ground or rolled down a slight terrace. When someone was captured, an arm was grasped by its wrist and pulled along the spine toward the pit of the neck until the prisoner in mock pain cried out enough. Prisoners were taken away to camp, I was told, beneath the bridge over the Illinois Central tracks. When I was seven and when I wasn't being a cowboy, I would spend most of my summer building roads in the soft cool earth. Now the area was off limits, a phrase I would also learn more thoroughly in two years. I waited with gun in hand while the prisoners, American GIs, Japanese or Nazis were hurried off to the mysteries of prison.

I stood at the back of my yard as conquerers walked the captive down the alley, beneath the low shrubbery and along the cool bank that led, after a few hundred feet, to the bridge. My wait was seldom rewarded by a return of my playmates. The game of War with me as participant had to wait until the next clear day.

Ellie began to help take one or another of the other girls or boys prisoner. Terry said that Ellie didn't wear any underpants and warned me not to tell that either. Then he told me that what I saw Wayne and him do in the garage was what everyone did in the concentration camp. He said Ellie taught them last summer. About this time, Terry began to chew a toothpick. Sometimes he sucked air in between his teeth then chewed on his toothpick again.

3.

Toward the end of June my father told me that my mother had to go to the hospital for a few weeks and that she was going to have an operation. I stayed with Terry and his mother during the day. My sister, Carol, got to stay with our cousin, Joyce, for a week. That was Carol's vacation. Carol came home and one night my father took us to see Mother at the hospital. My father stood me on a chair by the side of the bed. I had on my blue and white seersucker sunsuit and my white socks and white shoes. My sister had combed my hair so that I would look nice for Mother. Carol had sprinkled some of Dad's Vitalis on her hands and rubbed them together and then lightly brushed her hands over my hair. I could smell the Vitalis until we entered the hospital.

Mother's room was dark. Blinds at the window were drawn and the red sunset did not enter the room. A table lamp allowed me to see Mother from my stand. Her eyes were closed, I think, and her thin arms lay at her sides on top of the white sheet. Her face and bare arms and hands already twisted by arthritis were waxy. I did not know what had happened to her. I was afraid that she was going to die like grandma did last winter. Mother was as still as grandma had been.

"I've brought Carol and Roger to see you Mary," Dad said. I think he was nervous too.

Mother said, "Carol," and then she said, "And Roger, dear Roger."

She didn't smile or anything. I don't think I ever saw her move her lips. The voice was somewhere inside of her. I was afraid that if I hugged her I would hurt her more.

4.

I was quiet, and Carol helped a lot when Mother came home. She was happier at times. She still sat alone throughout the summer from time to time and cried softly to herself. But even then she would call me to her and hold my head to her chest.

One day that summer I was out roller skating. Sonny Boy Gorman who was visiting his aunt, Mrs. Abeck, roller skated with me. Mary Bea Wagner and Paula Hoffman who lived up on Raab Avenue skated our way. Mary Bea did fancy turns. Then she skated on one foot. Then she did quick stops like an ice skater. Mary Bea was very thin. She was eight years old. She looked graceful as she skated along gliding smoothly and evenly on first her right skate and then her left. I shuffled along like the inexperienced and wobbly skater I was. Sonny Boy tried to learn Mary Bea's fancy turns.

Paula said, "Roger, come hold my hand. I'll show you how to take a longer stride."

Paula was nine, but not as tall as Mary Bea. Paula pulled me along like I was a wagon. She told me to keep my feet together.

I fell even though Paula held my hand.

I got to my knees and then raised myself like a slow Jack-in-the-box from my position in the grass next to the sidewalk where I was sure that my skates would not send me tumbling again.

"You're learning, Rog," Paula said. "Sometimes it takes a couple of falls before you catch on." Then she kissed me on the lips. I wasn't expecting that, and I ran home as best I could with those skates on. I told my mother what Paula did. Then I thought of Terry's warning. My sister giggled and laughed. Mother thought that the kiss was okay. She said Paula probably just wanted to help comfort me after my fall.

Still that kiss made me want to cry.

I played with my erector set that afternoon and built a crane which I showed to my father when he came home. I used the crane to pick up bolts and screws and marbles. I kept my marbles in a Manhattan coffee can.

5.

Toward the beginning of August, Mother and Dad took Carol to St. Louis to shop for school clothes.

"Roger will get tired in this terrible heat," Mother said.

"Call your sister-in-law, Kate. She would like to have Roger stay with her for the day."

Aunt Kate had a new baby. He was a year old. I got to help Aunt Kate give Tommy a bath that Saturday afternoon.

"He has a penis too," I said.

Aunt Kate told me that all boys had a penis and that they used them to pee as I knew. When boys grow up to be men, then they use their penises to help mothers make babies. She told me about seeds and eggs and that

Tommy had resulted from one of her eggs and some of Uncle Charles' seeds.

I stared at Tommy's penis, smaller than mine.

Aunt Kate told me that after the seed made a home in the egg the mother carried it for months and it grew into a baby. I thought that was a wonderful story.

I was just bursting to tell my family Aunt Kate's story. When Dad picked me up late in the afternoon to take me home I stopped by my garden and picked pink and white and dark red cosmos for the dinner table.

Carol had gotten a new coat for winter. The coat was navy blue with six gold buttons on the front. Right before supper, she put it on to show me. I thought she looked very pretty. Her hair was dark and long and fell in waves over her shoulders. I told her she looked pretty. Carol always loved to go shopping.

Carol talked about all the beautiful clothes she saw. I waited my turn.

"Make him stop. Make him get away from the table, Mother," Carol said. She glared at me.

"Dad, talk to the child," Mother said. She got up from the table and took Carol into the living room.

"That's no way to talk at the table in front of women, son. Who told you? Terry? Wayne?"

I told on Aunt Kate.

"Kate told Roger while he was there today. Come back to the table and finish your meal. We'll talk to Kate."

6.

Three weeks before I was to start kindergarten, Mother took me to school to meet my teacher and tell the teacher that I had been vaccinated. Mother took me and Kathy Thompson to the Raab Avenue school just after lunch. Kathy's mother worked and couldn't get off that afternoon, so my mother said she would register Kathy. We walked up Goodfellow Street to Eleventh Avenue then turned onto Raab Avenue. There at the corner was Perino's Grocery Store in their house and right across the street was the Henry Raab School. Kathy had started school in January. She knew what was going on. She talked to my mother about how much she liked Mrs. Iris the teacher. Mother said that Mrs. Iris had been Carol's teacher. Kathy said that she was going to be in the A section and that I was going to be in the B section. She said that the A section was older than the B section and that the A section would be promoted to the first grade and be the B section for a while. She said that's how you went from grade to grade through school.

Mrs. Iris actually had on a lavender dress with a white lace collar and short sleeves. She said that she had been my sister's teacher a few years ago. She said that she had been impressed because Carol could read a book in kindergarten. She asked me what I could do.

On the way back home I walked along behind Mother and Kathy. At Perino's Mother had gotten us an orange popsicle to share. I was careful so as not to drip on my new school pants. They were long and dark blue. Mother had wrapped a tissue around the stick. Still, before we were half way home I could feel a sticky rivulet or two crawl past my wrist and seek my elbow.

"Hi Ellie," Kathy said.

I looked at Ellie standing up against an elm tree. She had on a short tan dress. It looked soiled. She had no shoes on and her feet and ankles were coated with dirt. She held her hands cupped together at her waist.

"Been to school," Kathy said.

"Roger too?" Ellie said.

Mother smiled at the children. I watched her. I wondered if she knew that Ellie didn't wear underpants. I wondered what she would say if I told her. Mother took my popsicle stick and paused to wipe my mouth and left arm with a tissue.

Kathy said to me, "Ellie has a little snake that she carries around in her hands."

7.

We were going to go to Forest Park to the zoo for my birthday. My birthday was on Tuesday this year, but we couldn't go to the zoo until Saturday because my father had to work all week.

Carol wished me happy birthday and said that I was Tuesday's child. I knew the rhyme. Mother was going to bake a white cake and put pink icing on it. Mother told me to go outside and not to jump in the house so the cake wouldn't fall.

Nobody had played War for a few weeks. There were some cowboys in the neighborhood. But mostly the children sat around waiting for the vacation to end. From time to time a child here and there made its way along the path to the area under the bridge. Mary Bea was still skating. Paula always said hi to me when the two rolled past on the sidewalk.

"It's Rog's birthday," Terry said.

"He's five today," Paula said.

"Ellie wants to show you something," Wayne said.

No, oh no, I thought. They didn't push me. But there were five or six of them in a semi-circle. I walked along in front of them. I did not want to see Ellie. My knees and elbows ached.

Ellie stood near a concrete footing of the bridge. There were poison berry bushes all around.

"Roger won't tell," Wayne said.

"Come and look," Ellie said. She held her lips tight as though she was going to break into a smile or laugh.

Ellie held her cupped hands in front of her right cheek. She kept her lips fixed on me. Her eyes were dark brown or black.

I closed my eyes. When I opened them I was standing right in front of her looking at her clasped hands. Between her crossed thumbs and her index finger folded over a knuckle there was a small dark hole. Her fingernails were broken and dirtier than mine ever were even when I worked the soil in my flower garden.

"Just put your eye up here," Ellie soothed.

Before I moved any closer I knew what I would see. Small folds of pink flesh scented with earth and sea and sky, a dark humid enclosure, harboring her treasure. Would it snatch my eye? Would she snatch my breath away? □

UNCLASSIFIEDS

S.G. Tyler
David Surface
Marvin R. Hiemstra
Reginald Gibbons
Kelly Cherry
William Petersen
Ken Kalfus

S.G. TYLER

ALICE'S SNAZZY PAJAMAS

Alice bought her pajamas in the lingerie department. They were a pale grey silk, with square-cut short sleeves and long pants. A little line of white piping edged the cuffs and ran the length of the shirt front, the buttons had the lustre of pearl. New they'd cost two-hundred and twenty dollars.

Alice got them at Goodwill for three bucks. She'd been desperate for a flannel nightgown, but when she'd gone through the ratty, worn pile of night clothes in the back corner of the store, she'd stopped short when she'd come across the pajamas. The seam under one arm was gaping open and they were wrinkled beyond belief, a dead giveaway of their authenticity. At first she couldn't believe it.

When she got them home, she took out Ivory Snow and washed them. She hung them on the back porch where she had her clothesline, putting pieces of Saran Wrap between the material and the pins. When they were dry she brought them inside and mended the arm, and then set up her ironing board. She had been waiting for this moment. Like magic the silk smoothed out and the garments became slinky and soft. She draped them carefully on a hanger in the doorway and stood looking at them for a long time. Then she spread them out on her bed and fingered the material. Never in her life had she owned anything like these. Never had she expected to. She was spellbound just looking at them.

Every night when she got off work, she'd start thinking about her pajamas. The winter streets were dark and slippery and the buses out of the city were packed, but Alice would fight her way to a seat, or stand patiently holding a strap, wrapped in a lot more than her thin cloth coat. She felt like someone special.

The pajamas got her through four and a half months. She would wear them for an hour or so every night after her shower and before going to bed. Sometimes she would arrange herself on pillows on the sofa and read movie magazines. Other nights she'd prop herself up in bed and watch TV. It depended on her mood.

Then in March her sister came over. She'd left her husband, the bastard, and arrived on Alice's doorstep at nine o'clock one night with her two-year-old and the new baby. Alice had just been reading about the Academy Awards.

They put the baby to sleep in the laundry basket fixed up for a bed, and Alice gave her nephew something to drink and a paper and pencil to draw with while she tried to comfort her sister and get the whole story. The upshot of the evening was that the grape juice got knocked over and spread across the tablecloth. It also stained the pajamas. There was nothing to be done. Through her tears her sister decided to move in until she could get a place of her own.

It was crowded. There were only two rooms. But they worked it out for six weeks until her sister returned to the bastard to try again. They both knew she'd be back before long, but for now at least it seemed okay.

Alice never mentioned the pajamas. She tried washing them out, but nothing would remove the grape juice that wouldn't bleach out the color of the fabric as well. So after a couple of tries, she ironed them smooth, folded them in tissue paper, and put them away in the bottom drawer of her dresser with a lavender sachet. Every now and then she'd lay them out on her bed and admire them, folding the stained edge of the top back and covering the spots on the pant leg by turning them under. But she never put them on again. It wasn't the same.

Alice continued to visit Goodwill every week to look through the merchandise as usual. She always looked for nice things. She picked up a wool blazer for only seven dollars, and one time came across an almost new leather purse. Though she never found anything much in the lingerie corner, Alice kept looking. Knowing those snazzy pajamas were at home in her drawer was enough. She knew anything was possible. □

DAVID SURFACE

PATTERNING

At first we were going to their house once every week but that changed and we went every two weeks. The room we came into was bright and smelled like the sheets folded on the table and his arm was already bare and warm when you took it.

What would that be like, to live in a body with no future, with none of the complexities and deceptions that come with having a future and a body, to have everything you'll ever be gathered together in one place so close that anyone could cover the whole thing from end to end with two hands?

She makes us wash our hands before we begin. We have to be very careful not to get any dirt near his eyes or mouth because he's never played on the floor and picked up any of the regular immunities.

We are ready to begin.

This arm is so white in my hands, when I hold it my fingers look heavy and gray like things made of cement. She puts on music, a record of string quartets. Short reliable rhythms like an animal's pulse. The music helps. We begin.

The theory of patterning therapy for brain damaged infants is this — the child's arms, legs and head are manipulated to simulate the rhythmic movements of crawling. In this way the electrical signals buried in the brain can find their way back out into those empty places and the body remembers what it never learned.

We stand around a small table, one of us at each corner and one more at the end to hold his head. It is very bright in this room and no one speaks except for her. She has made coffee for whoever wants it. This is her house and everything here belongs to her.

Take his arm in both hands, one at the wrist and one below the elbow. Bring it forward until the hand is level with his head. Move in circles. Then pull it back in toward his body. Like this. Watch the person across from you and keep in time with each other.

Now the only sounds in the room are the cellos pulsing from the record player and the soft sliding noise of his arms and legs going back and forth across the plastic cushion.

Kevin's father is not with us. He is at the college on the hill teaching the theater students how to build sets and light up a stage. He is leaning on the edge of his desk smoking a cigarette while the whole class watches. He is telling them about the great David Belasco and his cigarette makes patterns back and forth in the air. After we leave he will come home and tell more things to Kevin. He will tell them all walking with Kevin across his shoulder, pressing their two heads close as one head and whoever watches them watches terrible confidences passing between them and is frightened. That will all be later. Now he is telling the class about David Belasco who brought trees and grass and live cows into theaters to make the most lifelike sets on the American stage. Of course that was all very long ago and today we know how few materials it takes to bring a stage to life.

Now she is talking to him, turning his head from side to side between her hands, making a conversation for the two of them out of any object that is close enough. A ball of sunlight on the table. The way his hair keeps falling into his eyes.

Hair that is white and almost weightless. Two eyelids, soft and big as moth wings. A face.

I've been moving his arm around in circles for ten minutes and already the room has grown warmer. He doesn't resist us or help us. He lets us do what we want with him. He is being patient with us. We have so much farther to go but he is all here in one place. He is complete and we are not.

We are finished for today. They want me to get into the car with them and drive away but there is too much of me scattered all over. There are trees behind the houses and the trees are taller and simpler than the houses. I've grown up wrong. Now I have to go back and begin all over again.

After Kevin died the four of us were never all in her kitchen at the same time again. They had another child, a girl. She grew bigger and wore dresses and laughed at people.

I talked with a student who was taking a class in lighting-design from Kevin's father while the boy was still alive.

"One day he had the room dark when we came in. After everybody got into their seats he flipped a switch and all these spotlights started coming on over our heads, not all at the same time but one after another, you know, like dominoes. He'd make all these patterns with them in the ceiling, great big spirals and figure-eights. It took about two minutes for all of them to come on. He must have been there all night rigging those up. When the last one came on everybody went crazy and he just smiled and leaned back on his desk and said, let there be light." □

MARVIN R. HIEMSTRA

HAPPY TRAILS!

WINNEBAGO wiggled its muffler. WINNEBAGO started to roll while everyone was running to the other end of the beach, twisting binoculars to watch an American eagle feed a fresh snake to her baby. An uneasy, steady grind in the sand sealed everybody's mouth up tight. No one had ever dreamed that a perfectly happy R.V. would end it all without a whoop. WINNEBAGO headed straight for the water. WINNEBAGO seemed to know exactly what it wanted.

WINNEBAGO'S Mistress screamed—"Ohhh, my new jumpsuit! Violets on the shoulders! They'll run!"

"Forgot the brake! Don't worry, Dear," said the Master of WINNEBAGO. "I'll buy you another one."

Crowd gasped as the front wheels nudged water. "Bottom goes down to 100 feet in four yards," announced Harry Bunns. "You'll never see it again."

"Oh, Honey!" moaned the Mistress of WINNEBAGO.

"I'll buy you another one, real soon," whispered the Master, carefully polishing an elbow of the Mistress.

Water was moving up to the handmade knotty pine sign on the door that said, "HOME, SWEET ROLLING HOME."

"I never trust hand brakes, especially when they're not on," muttered Franchine Particular, anxiously tickling her Apache tear agates.

Little Johnny Spot squealed, "Look at that fucker sink!"

"Coffee water should be hot by now," sighed the Mistress.

"Did you leave your R.V. turned on?" snarled Betty Twine.

Water took WINNEBAGO into her gentle arms.

"Here comes the ranger's pickup—maybe he's got a rope!" shouted Gladys Bright.

"You going to swim out and tie it on?" asked her husband Stanley.

WINNEBAGO shimmied in the water and the door popped open. WINNEBAGO floated firm as the water slowly took over. One by one as if cued by a pushy QUICK-STOP fairy—the contents made their proud debut, water-borne for all to see: one box of EARTH CRUNCH (coupon for free solar mittens face down), one can of worms, one economy size spot remover, one yellow jumpsuit (epaulets swarming with crocheted violets) floating snug in a transparent OPHELIA'S DRY CLEAN WHILE-U-WAIT wrap, one fleeting glimpse of a fishing scale, two Gravensteins and one banana, one cowboy boot with a mock water moccasin wing tip. . . .

WINNEBAGO dived, resurfaced for an instant (tilted up like a contented cubist tepee) and dived again — at last on the long, happy trail to Eternity. Ed Bang showed a rare presence of mind and shot his POLAROID at the three second tepee, a brief monument to Civilization and its pleasures.

Mistress of WINNEBAGO was sobbing. "I gave up my favorite guacamole dip in Palm Springs for this trip."

"I'll buy you another one, Sweet Cakes. Don't fret!" said the Master of WINNEBAGO polishing both her elbows, tenderly. □

REGINALD GIBBONS

FIVE PEARS OR PEACHES

Buckled into the cramped back seat, she sings to herself as I drive toward her school. Straining upward to see out her window, she watches the things that go by, the ones she sees — I know only that some of them are the houses we sometimes say we wish were ours. But today as we pass them we only think it; or I do, while she's singing — the big yellow one with a roofed portico for cars never there, the pink stucco one with red shutters that's her favorite. Most of what she sings rhymes as it unwinds in the direction she goes with it. Half the way to school she sings, and then she stops, the song becomes a secret she'd rather keep to herself, her underground sweetwater stream through the tiny continent of her, on which her high oboe voice floats through forests softly, the calling of a hidden pensive bird — this is the way I strain my grasp to imagine what it's like for her to be thinking of things, to herself, to be feeling her happiness or fear.

After I leave her inside the school, which was converted from an old house in whose kitchen you can almost still smell the fruit being cooked down for canning, she waves goodbye from a window, and I can make her cover her mouth with one hand and laugh and roll her eyes at a small classmate if I cavort a little down the walk.

In some of her paintings, the sun's red and has teeth, but the houses are cheerful, and fat flying birds with almost human faces and long noses for beaks sail downward toward the earth, where her giant bright flowers overshadow like trees the people she draws.

At the end of the day, her naked delight in the bath is delight in a lake of still pleasures, a straight unhurried sailing in a good breeze, and a luxurious trust that there will always be this calm warm weather, and someone's hand to steer and steady the skiff of her. Ashore, orchards are blooming.

Before I get into bed with her mother at night, in our house, I look in on her and watch her sleeping hands come near her face to sweep away what's bothering her dreaming eyes. I ease my hand under her back and lift her from the edge of the bed to the center. I can almost catch the whole span of her shoulders in one hand — five pears or peaches, it might be, dreaming in a delicate basket — till they tip with their own live weight and slip from my grasp. □

KELLY CHERRY

ETERNITY DIES

> "Eternity is in love with the productions of time."
> —Blake, *Proverbs of Hell*

There was no knowing how long he had waited, nor had he known even that he was waiting, because duration and anticipation were not yet ideas he had thought of. Oh, he knew all there was to know; he was omniscient, after all. But he was all there was to know. He did not yet know all that there could or would be to know. The ideas of "yet" and "not yet" remained unthought.

He lived in a world of unimaginable—to us—density, because he was the whole of that world. He was all solid radiance, possibility itself packed to the mathematical point of first existence, a density nothing actual can equal; his temperature measured in the trillions of degrees. He was on fire, burning with knowledge; he was brilliant. Yet because he was All, and contained All, and there was nothing that was not already known to him because there was nothing that was not contained in him, he was lonely, and he had been lonely for longer than he could know.

And it was that—his reflecting that he was lonely—which brought the universe into being. He thought to himself, I am lonely—and everything that is came into being, or at least the beginning of it did. It was separate from him, and in this separation, the simple fact of separation, dwelled hope—this was the first Hope—hope of reunion; at the same time, it was necessarily forever-separate. He had thought this thought: I am lonely, and the universe exploded into existence, a fireball so intense it was white, with a whiteness never again to be equaled. Light and energy poured from him; he felt the shock of that transmission. Good, he thought; it was good. But he despaired of ever being whole again. That was the first Despair. It was he who had brought despair into being, by becoming his non-self.

We have calculated that at 10^{-43} seconds after his thinking, I am lonely, his density was only 10^{90} tons per cubic inch. Dense almost beyond belief, this was nevertheless a finite density.

At the age of one second, the universe had a density that was the density of water, and as the universe expanded, the energy released condensed into matter and antimatter: electrons, protons, neutrons, hydrogen and helium.

All this followed logically on the thought of his loneliness. His thinking that thought was the First Cause. Thus even the First Cause was caused, but it was also uncaused, because it was not caused by anything that existed. It was caused before existence existed, by his thinking of his loneliness.

All this happened in about three minutes, and then a million years elapsed, until the temperature of the universe had cooled enough for atoms to form. Atoms permitted the light to travel through them: the universe became visible.

He was despairing, and full of hope, and learning time, watching the universe take shape. He thought of duration, of anticipation. These were ideas entailed by the logic of despair and hope, and so naturally he thought of them, despairing and hoping, and all the while, he was watching the universe take shape.

The light and energy that were radiating from him were moving outward, farther and farther, spreading like water. Clouds of hydrogen cartwheeled through space. Like partners in a random celebration, a cosmic jubilee, atoms occasionally touched, and where they did so, small clumps of condensed gas burst into being. Where atoms came together in groups large enough to exert enough gravity, they stuck together. Eventually a cloud would collapse inward, the atoms' gravity tugging them toward the center, and the temperature at the cloud's center climbed. When the temperature reached 20 million degrees Fahrenheit, and the diameter was a mere one million miles, the ball became a fireball. This nuclear fire liberated the energy that had been locked inside; the energy radiated light and heat, as he did. Stars. He was the Star of stars.

The burning up of the hydrogen resulted in "ashes" of new elements. The materials of our universe are by-products. The first element, hydrogen, had been the result of a thought, the thought of his loneliness. He had created, from the beginning, in his own image.

There was no other way.

And now there were galaxies and stars, and some light and energy lessened, loosened, as the hydrogen converted itself into heavier elements, and now there were solar systems, including our own.

When the planets had formed out of bits of rock and shimmering crystals of ice slowly orbiting the new sun, ours began to melt at the core, where the radioactive atoms were disintegrating. Volcanoes were spawned. Lava flowed over the hard rock surface of the earth, carrying sulphurous gas that condensed into water. Oceans rained.

Methane drifted ominously over the chilly planet;

the oceans were really one large ocean. Lightning fragmented the sky; the span of sky was like a puzzle whose pieces have been shaken from a box onto the card-table; the edges of the pieces were jagged, like combs with broken teeth, or a broken window. It was the beginning of life as we know it, this lightning; it mixed the atmospheric gases into new atomic arrangements known as amino acids.

Soon, then: molecules that reproduced themselves. DNA. Protozoa. The phyla, the species. And then: trees, mosses, salamanders, sharks, the woolly mammoth. And riptides and continents, continental plates, and people and their stories about themselves, the long attempt to make sense beginning.

He watched all this activity that was separate from himself, and longing filled him as if he were a basin, and his desire, rain—rain that went on for whole eons. It seemed to him that only now did he know precisely how lonely he had been. That was the first Irony.

Fishes and dinosaurs! The glyptodont—the giant armadillo—and the saber-toothed tiger! Birds' wings fanning the tops of eucalyptus trees, and the platypus trundling around Australia, and the lemming throwing itself off a cliff, and elephants, and trillium, and tapestries woven by creatures that walked on two legs! How he longed to be one of these last, walking among them, sharing their meals, telling them—oh, yes!—telling them all that he had to say.

It was like being alone. He was lonely—and he was alone. Everything had emanated from him, he had created the panorama in all its details and fineness, but his own generosity—or was it selfishness? He thought it might be both at once—had isolated him. He might just as well have been a leper.

And then, as he was gazing on the earth, tears in his eyes—but he refused to let them fall, yet—he saw something. Something in particular. He had to peer more closely, to squint, in fact, it was so small.

It was a potato vine, and it was growing in Peru.

There were very many wild potatoes then, in Peru and parts of Argentina and "on the coastal plains of southern Chile," and in Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador. Some were red- or purple- or yellow-skinned, scabby-looking. They were round or oval or elliptical or oblong. They had deep eyes, and some could be said to "look like concertinas," according to J. G. Hawkes, and others like "worms or snakes." They were cultivated by Indians who lived around Lake Titicaca. Today, in the Mantaro Valley of Peru, there is a scientific collection of over 12,000 varieties of potato. The potato known as *Chapiña* is black through and through; the natives used it to dye cloth.

It was *Chapiña* he saw, and now he saw the tiny tuber below the topsoil (he could, certainly, see everywhere, although some things were harder to see than others). He saw its thumb-sized black-through-and-through lumpy potato-body; and he fell in love.

Perhaps it was ridiculous: to fall in love with a potato. The world held so many things, live and inanimate, and even some, like viruses, that were sometimes one and sometimes the other. But love is love; it occurs at first sight—when the proper seeds have been planted in the right soil and the time is ripe—and so it was that he fell in love with a potato.

Such a little potato! Such a black potato! Such a *Chapiña*!

He had been so lonely and so alone for so long, and now he felt an urgency he had never before known.

He must tell the potato of his love.

Cautiously, he bent his spirit toward Peru. *Chapiña*, under the earth, noticed nothing.

It was a clear day. The blue sky sang with mosquitoes and dragonflies; trees turned their leaves toward the sun; the peaks of the Andes sparkled as if stars were embedded in their snowbanks.

He bent his spirit; he touched the earth; he whispered, "*Chapiña*."

The little potato could not speak; it had no mouth to speak with.

He went down into the earth, as if entering a sepulchre in a garden. *Chapiña* looked at him, all those deep eyes staring at him through the darkness.

And then those eyes began to weep. He had not yet learned how, but *Chapiña* knew how. The little Peruvian potato wept and wept.

"Don't cry," he said.

And now, miraculously, *Chapiña* could speak. Because it was not necessary actually to speak. He could hear everything the little potato thought.

"I must cry," thought the little black potato, and he heard. "It's all right for you to love *me*, but how can I love *you*? I have nothing to give you in return, no arms to hold you with. I will stay here, only here, until I die. You created me, but you forgot to make me capable of loving you. You never stopped to think how cruel you were being."

Of course this speech broke his heart; he wondered if he had ever heard anything so sad as *Chapiña's* words. Why, *Chapiña* was as sad as he had been back before there had been anything outside himself, when, being All, he had thought, I am lonely, and *he* was the cause of this other being's sadness!

He wept.

He was filled with remorse and pain, with guilt.

He wept, and the little potato, wanting to wipe his tears away, extended its tentacles, wrapping him in a warm embrace. Earth stopped up his mouth, his eyes; he was buried in earth. He was happy.

Yes, happy!—it was not something he had ever thought of before, happiness, and it was something he recognized as soon as he perceived the possibility of redemption. To love *Chapiña*—to love anything or anyone like this was to triumph over Irony, and Despair, and even Hope.

And so he died, his spirit nourishing the earth he had made. And that is why, from that day to this, there has existed only Time, and the memory of what we are rooted in. □

WILLIAM PETERSEN

NEIGHBORS

The guy in the opposite apartment would knock on my door in the late afternoon. His door was four feet opposite mine. He always wanted to talk literature. His wife would be away.

"You want some wine?" he'd ask, his tumbler already full. We'd sit at a table in his living room. There was always a jug of cheap red. He'd pour a sixteen-ounce glass. Strictly for cooking. It was hard to finish and I had to be careful he didn't top it off when I wasn't looking. Then I'd have to talk more literature.

One day we had dinner with them. My wife asked his wife, "What color is your hair?" She had a blond wig on.

"You've seen," she said. "Brunette."

I'd never paid attention.

One day things reversed. It was afternoon. I went over to knock on his door. I wanted to talk literature. The door was open. I knocked and whistled and looked through the screen door. I pulled the screen door open a bit to call out. His wife was passing from the bedroom to the bathroom. I was stunned by her bald head. The rest of her nakedness was gratuitous. She hadn't heard me. When she saw me she screamed. She came back from the bathroom wrapped in a towel.

"You caught me," she said.

"I came to see Ed."

"He'll be back soon. If you want you can wait."

I sat at the table and poured myself a sixteen-ounce glass of red. I only took a sip.

I heard clacking and splashing.

I walked to the bathroom and stood in the door.

She was still wet.

"Is this blackmail?" she asked. □

KEN KALFUS

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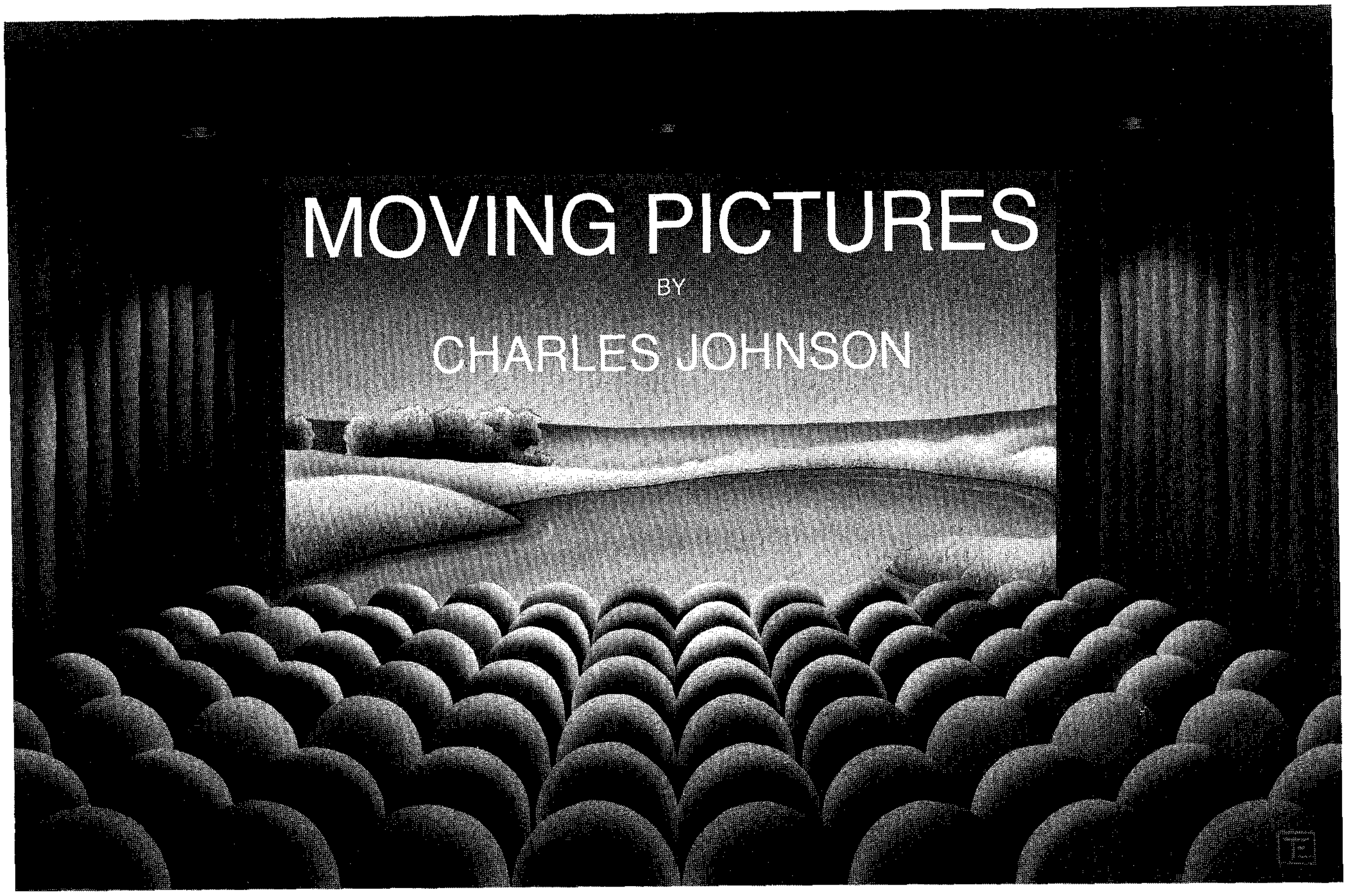


MOVING PICTURES

BY

CHARLES JOHNSON

TIMOTHY EARP

You sit in the Neptune Theatre waiting for the thin, overhead lights to dim with a sense of respect, perhaps even reverence, for American movie houses are, as everyone knows, the new cathedrals, their stories better remembered than legends, totems, or mythologies, their directors more popular than novelists, more influential than saints—enough people, you've been told, have seen the James Bond adventures to fill the entire country of Argentina. Perhaps you have written this movie. Perhaps not. Regardless, you come to it as everyone does, as a seeker groping in the darkness for light, hoping something magical will be beamed from above, and no matter how bad this matinee is, or silly, something deep and maybe even too dangerous to talk loudly about will indeed happen to you and the others before this drama reels to its last transparent frame.

Naturally, you have left your life outside the door. Like any life, it's a messy thing, hardly as orderly as art, what some call life in the fast lane—: the Sanka and sugar-donut breakfasts, bumper-to-bumper traffic downtown, the business lunches, and a breakneck schedule not to get ahead but simply to stay in one place, which is peculiar, because you grew up in the 'sixties speeding on Methadone and despising all this, knowing your Age (Aquarian) was made for finer stuff. But no matter. Outside, across town, you have put away for ninety minutes the tedious, repetitive job that is, obviously, beneath your talents, sensitivity, and education (a degree in English), the once beautiful woman—or wife—a former model (local), college dancer, or semi-professional actress named Megan or Daphne, who has grown tired of you, or you of her, and talks now of legal separation and finding herself, the children from a former, frighteningly brief marriage who you don't want to lose, the mortgage, alimony, IRS audit, the aging, gin-fattened face that once favored a rock star's but now frowns back at you in the bathroom mirror, the young woman at work, born in 1960 and unable to recall John Kennedy, who after the Christmas party took you to bed in her spacious downtown loft, perhaps out of pity because your mother, God bless her, died and left you with a thousand dollars in debt before you could get the old family house clear—all that shelved, mercifully, as the film starts: first that frosty mountaintop ringed by stars, or a lion roaring, or floodlights bathing the tips of buildings in a Hollywood skyline: stable trademarks in a world of flux, you think, sure-fire signs that whatever follows—tragedy or farce—is made by people who are accomplished dream-merchants. Perhaps more: masters of vision, geniuses of the epistemological Murphy.

If you have written this film, which is possible, you look for your name in the credits, and probably frown at the names of the Crew, each recalling some disaster during the production, first at the studio, then later on location for five weeks in Oklahoma cowtowns during the winter, which was worse than living on the moon, the days boiling and nights so cold. Nevertheless, you'd seen it as a miracle, an act of God when the director, having read your novel, called, offering you the project—a historical romance—then walked you patiently through the first eight drafts, suspicious of you at first (there was real money riding on this, it wasn't poetry), of your dreary, novelistic pretensions to Deep Profundity, and you equally suspicious of him, his background in sitcoms, obsession with "keeping it sexy," and love of Laurel and Hardy films. For this you wrote a dissertation on Derrida? Yet, you'd listened. He was right, in the end. He was good, you admitted, grudgingly. He knew, as you—with your liberal arts degree—didn't, the meaning of Entertainment. You'd learned. With his help, you got good, too. You gloated. And lost friends. "A movie?" said your poet friends, "that's wonderful, it's happening for you," and then they avoided you as if you had AIDS. What *was* happening was this:

You'd shelved the novel, the Big Book, for bucks monitored by the Writers Guild (West), threw yourself into fast-and-dirty scripts, the instant gratification of quick deadlines and fat checks because the Book, with its complexity and promise of critical praise, the Book with its long-distance demands and no financial reward whatsoever, was impossible, and besides, you didn't have it anymore, not really, the gift for narrative or language, while the scripts were easy, like writing shorthand, and soon—way sooner than you thought—the films, with their lifespan shorter than a mayfly's, were all you could do. It's a living, you said. Nothing lasts forever. And you pushed on.

The credits crawl up against a montage of Oklahoma farmlife, and in this you read a story, too, even before the film begins. For the audience, the actors are stars, the new Olympians, but oh, you know them, this one—the male lead—whose range is boundless, who could be a Brando, but who hadn't seen work in two years before this role and survived by doing voice-overs for a cartoon villain in *The Smurfs*; that one—the female supporting role—who can play the full scale of emotions, but whose last memorable performance was a commercial for Rolaids, all of them; all, including you, fighting for life in a city where the air is so corrupt joggers spit black after a two-mile run; failing, trying desperately to keep up the front of doing-well, these actors, treating you shabbily sometimes because your salary was bigger than theirs, even larger than the producer's, though he wasn't exactly hurting—no, he was richer than a Medieval king, a complex man of remarkable charm and cunning, someone to both admire for his Horatio Alger orphan-boy success and fear for his worship at the altar of power. You won't forget the evening he asked you to his home after a long conference, served you Scotch, and then, from inside a drawer in his desk removed an envelope, dumped its contents out, and you saw maybe fifty snapshots of beautiful, naked women on his bed—all of them second-rate actresses, though the female supporting role was there, too—and he watched you closely for your reaction, sipping his drink, smiling, then asked, "You ever sleep with a woman like that?" No, you hadn't. And, no, you didn't trust him either. You didn't turn your back. But, then again, nobody in this business did, and in some ways he was, you knew, better than most.

You'd compromised, given up ground, won a few artistic points, but generally you agreed to the producer's ideas—it *was* his show—and then the small army of badly-paid performers and production people took over, you trailing behind them in Oklahoma, trying to look writerly, wearing a Panama hat, holding your notepad ready for rewrites, surviving the tedium of eight or nine takes for difficult scenes, the fights, fallings-out, bad catered food, and midnight affairs, watching your script change at each level of interpretation—director, actor—until it was unrecognizable, a new thing entirely, a celebration of the Crew. Not you. Does anyone suspect how bad this thing really looked in roughcut? How miraculous it is that its rags of shots, conflicting ideas, and scraps of footage actually cohere? You sneak a look around at the audience, the faces lit by the glow of the screen. No one suspects. You've managed to fool them again, you old fox.

No matter whether the film is yours or not, it pulls you in, reels in your perception like a trout. On the narrow screen, the story begins with an establishing wideshot of an Oklahoma farm, then in close-up shows the face of a big, towheaded, brown-freckled boy named Bret, and finally settles on a two-shot of Bret and his blonde, bosomy girlfriend, Bess. No margin for failure in a formula like that. In the opening funeral scene at a tiny, whitewashed church, camera favors Bret, whose father has died. Our hero must seek his fortune in the city. Bess just hates to see him go. Dissolve to cemetery gate. As they leave the cemetery, and the coffin is lowered, she squeezes his hand, and something inside you shivers, the sense of ruin you felt at your own mother's funeral, the irreversible feeling of abandonment. There was no girl with you, but you wished to heaven there had been, the one named Sondra you knew in high school who wouldn't see you for squat, preferring basketball players to weird, little wimps and geeks, which is pretty much what you were back then, a washout to those who knew you, but you give all that to Bret and Bess, the pain of parental loss, the hopeless, quiet love never to be, which thickens the screen so thoroughly that when Bess kisses Bret your nose is clogged with tears and mucus, and then you have your handkerchief out, honking shamelessly, your eyes streaming, locked—even you—in a cycle of emotion (yours) which their images have borrowed, intensified, then given back to you, not because the images or sensations are sad, but because, at bottom, all you have known these last few minutes are the workings of your own nervous system. You yourself have been supplying the grief and satisfaction all along, from within. But even that is not the true magic of film.

As Bret rides away, you remember sitting in the studio's tiny editing room amidst reels of film hanging like stockings in a bathroom, the editor, a fat, friendly man named Coates, tolerating your curiosity, letting you peer into his viewer as he patched the first reel together, figuring he owed you, a semi-famous scriptwriter, that much. Each frame, you recall, was a single, frozen image, like an individual thought, complete in itself, with no connection to the others, as if time stood still; but then the frames came faster as the viewer sped up, chasing each other, surging forward and creating a linear, continuous motion that outstripped your perception, and presto: a sensuously rich world erupted and took such nerve-knocking reality that you shielded your eyes when the harpsichord music came up and Bret stepped into a darkened Oklahoma shed seen only from his point-of-view—oh yes, at times even your body responded, the sweat glands swaling, but it was lunchtime then and Coates wanted to go to the cafeteria for coffee and clicked off his viewer; the images flipped less quickly, slowed finally to a stop, the drama disappearing again into frames, and you saw, pulling on your coat, the nerve-wracking, heart-thumping vision for what it really was: the illusion of speed.

But is even that the magic of film? Sitting back in your seat, aware of your right leg falling asleep, you think so, for the film has no capacity to fool you anymore. You do not give it your feelings to transfigure. All that you see with godlike detachment are your own decisions, the lines that were dropped, and the microphone just visible in a corner of one scene. Nevertheless, it's gratifying to see the audience laugh out loud at the funny parts, and blubber when Bret rides home at last to marry Bess (actually, they hated each other on the set), believing, as you can't, in a dream spun from accelerated imagery. It almost makes a man feel superior, like knowing how Uri Geller bends all those spoons.

And then it is done, the theatre emptying, the hour and a half of illusion over. You file out with the others, amazed by how so much can be projected onto the *tabula rasa* of the Big Screen—grief, passion, fire, death—yet it remains, in the end, untouched. Dragging on your overcoat, the images still an afterglow in your thoughts, you step outside to the street. It takes your eyes, still in low gear, a moment to adjust to the light of late afternoon, traffic noise, and the things around you as you walk to your Fiat, feeling good, the objects on the street as flat and dimensionless at first as props on a stage. And then you stop.

The Fiat, you notice, has been broken into. The glove compartment has been rifled, and this is where you keep a checkbook, an extra key to the house, and where—you remember—you put the report due tomorrow at nine sharp. The glove compartment, how does it look? Like a part of your body, yes? A wound? From it spills a crumpled photo of your wife, who has asked you to move out so she can have the house, and another one of the children, who haven't the faintest idea how empty you feel getting up every morning to finance their lives at a job that is a ghastly joke, given your talents, where you can't slow down and at least four competitors stand waiting for you to step aside, fall on your face, or die, and the injustice of all this, what you see in the narrow range of radiation you call vision, in the velocity of ideation, is necessary and sufficient—as some logicians say—to bring your fists down again and again on the Fiat's roof. You climb inside, sit, furiously cranking the starter, then swear and lower your forehead to the steering-wheel, which is, as anyone in Hollywood can tell you, conduct unbecoming a triple-threat talent like yourself: producer, star, and director in the longest, most fabulous show of all. □

YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA

2527th BIRTHDAY OF THE BUDDHA

When the motorcade rolled to a halt, Quang Duc
climbed out & sat down in the street.
He crossed his legs,
& the other monks & nuns grew around him like petals—
challenging the morning sun,
debating with the air
he leafed through—visions brought down to earth.
Could his eyes burn the devil out of men?
A breath of peppermint oil
soothed someone's cry. Beyond terror made flesh—
he burned like a bundle of black joss sticks.
A high wind that started in California
fanned flames, turned blue page
by blue page of his biography of suicide,
leaving only his heart intact.
Waves of saffron robes bowed to the gasoline can.

ROGER WEINGARTEN

PERSONAL HOLIDAY

I returned from the emergency
operation just in time to overhear
you telling Papa he was being replaced
by one whose golf handicap was so low
you could walk on it, dragging me
across the street or squeezing welts
into my neck as he and you cursed and tore
your way out of adultery, that new idea, into what

would surface, in thirty years, as a point of view: daughter
leaves husband, son leaves wife, and I, the eldest
follow suit. Remember
the barber's son, his khakis
to his knees, feet apart in poison ivy, who thought
I should learn to masturbate over the leaves. And who
can forget your lawyer's
formal attire: Papa's, all green

tobacco leaves and drool
roaring his tits off—yours, temporarily
employed to uncover which one of you
I loved, not quite a teenager, above the other. He fooled
with the dial of the hearing aid, while Papa
and you, secreted behind the door, tumbled
into each other as I charged
the street where Papa's idea

of a private eye was reliving his years
of public service into a handkerchief. My Latin teacher
said I could make up for the work I missed.
My girlfriend kissed another guy. Recuperating
in the urology wing, I practiced my bar mitzvah speech as my gentile
roommate died of emphysema,
listening. Years later, in the corridor

of the resort motel, Papa threatened to cut me
out of his will to change
my mind about monogamy, telling my wife
about a gumshoe he would hire to tail
me and the new woman in my life. Some of the old ones
were first cousins, maids, and your mysteriously
reappearing heart like a tempered

glass door revolving between hell and Alaska.
Your daughter told me
you can't hear my name. Neither can I. Rupert.
Rondeau. Rodney. Rondell. Ellen
is the reason. I love someone
you'll never meet. Hold on
to the one you did as I let go
of you and Papa cursing each other's
parents walking the aisle of skullcaps
bobbing and beards over mouths babbling mucousy
incantations toward my brief
bar mitzvah speech. The rabbi, still breathing
out of great yellow nostrils, blessed me quick.
Your other son in a bow tie thought it a lark
and crossed himself on the way to the schnapps
and honey cake. Here in Vermont

there's a fire dancing
its blue head off in the open stove
putting its tongue where it pleases. Papa
in Palm Beach takes a nine iron
for a chip out of the rough and you're
filling shelves for the Christmas rush
on running bras and panties embossed
with little sayings to push

the man in her life through his day, not unlike
"metrical literacy" or the new
criteria. Brother wrote with joy,
after speaking to his wife with the flat of his hand,
of giving old cars a new life, wondering whether
to hate his father or smoke a joint. Sister,
over the phone, sounded uneasy out of marriage,
like one of the shivering young formalists

trying to cross against the light
without collars stays, license, or a
metronome. And we all
ran after our father's wife, leaving Papa
out of the family portrait, free to choose an iron
spined young widow so intent on cutting him
out of your maternal sphere—little girl,
second son, and black sheep number
one—she succeeded

with Papa under her thumb who chose a deaf
and dumb retreat from the souvenirs
and shrapnel of your enlightened
parentage. These days
I write and teach and love a woman
who loves me back. In '55 you surprised
the cold war era east side of town with brushfire
news of your adultery. Surprise but no crime.

It caught on. Wives that stayed married
went to work for wives that didn't. The men,
divorced or not, lost themselves in the creeks
and sand traps and watched the news, one hand draped
around a Heineken. Years pass. Your daughter falls
out of marriage with your ideal: golf buff
in red alpaca knit, well to do, a safe bet

these days—who could argue while falling asleep
or taking a long one from your second son's sensamilla
filled calabash. His ex-wife was not
your kind of sport. She loved the sauce
and testicles under a quilt
like no one else could and you were pleased
with her departure. Which brings me
to me continuing to feed the running diatribe

under a hair dryer, your neighbor
listening hard, while the blind manicurist's
emery board's sense of repetition
and sound curves your thumbnail
toward a fine and lacquered point. Mother,
your grandchildren are well enough and cared for,
but our love's nothing more
than imagining you gritting your teeth,
hating me or yourself, what's the difference.

FORTUNES AND OLD PERFUMES

RICHARD VAN OEL

by Jean Ross

"I've forgotten my Chanel number! What was my Chanel number?"

"That bath powder I gave you? 22."

"She means a long time ago, she means that perfume she had. I expect it was number 5, Mamma, Chanel number 5. She kept it the longest time, one little drop of it, dark as vanilla."

5, 22. The numbers go up as you go along. Like your age.

Libby and Louise, my daughters. One day lately I couldn't call Libby's name, I called her by my sisters'. Some days I remember more than others; I tell them, I have good days and bad days. Sometimes one of them says, "She's having one of her bad days," and I say, "*She*, who's she? Don't you remember my name?"

I told them when they were here: I dreamed about Jess last night. My oldest sister. She ran off with Earl Rippey when she was fourteen years old. He *borrowed* some of his grandma's money to run off on. She had it locked up in her bureau drawer, but he pulled out the drawer above it and took some. The Rippeys put it out that she was mixed up, had *forgotten*—forgotten how much it was or forgotten she'd said he could have it. They fixed it up, about the money; he gave it back. Jess didn't have anything to do with that. He was older than she was, up in his twenties; old enough to have more sense.

How it was, they were off with some young folks and somebody else was getting married; and he and some of the others said why didn't *they* get married too?—that was how she told it, anyway. It was just a prank—for fun, you could say. I hope it was fun, it was the last she had for quite some time.

My daughters, Libby and Louise, were here yesterday. I said, "I dreamed about your Aunt Jessie last night." Louise said, "What was the dream about?" And I said, "I forget. But we were back home. Before she married." They were never interested in her; how could they be interested in anyone who dipped snuff and didn't use correct English? They're nice girls; but they don't know what it was like back then. They like to see things done right, they like to have everything just so. That was how brought them up: I wanted them to be somebody.

Here in town the Everists thought they were somebody. Harlan's family; my husband Harlan. His sister threw it up to me about Jess once. "How's Jessie getting along?" She might not have meant it the way I took it, she could look at you funny out of those big starey eyes of hers; but she hardly knew Jess, so why was she asking? I said, "Just fine!," though that was probably not true; probably seldom true.

Jess came back a day or two after she ran off and got married—she was afraid to come by herself, so she got Grandma to come with her. To get her clothes, tell us goodbye; they went off to South Carolina to live. My mother would hardly speak to her. She was fourteen years old! She had dark hair and deep dark eyes, like Grandma; like my father's people. She used to make my doll clothes. That day, she wanted to come back to stay; that was what I thought. Now they'd say she was just a child; now you can read about it in the paper, fourteen-year-old girls and their problems and what you can do about them. You could spend the whole day reading about it.

I can see the room—we were a big family, and at that time my father hadn't added on the hall and the other side of the house; the rooms were all bedrooms except the kitchen, and when Jess came back we were there in the sitting room, my parents' room, with the fireplace and the bed and the bureau with the salve jars and the comb stuck crossways on the brush, the straight-backed cane bottomed chairs everybody used then, and the sewing machine under the window; and just outside the window, planted where you could see it from inside, the old yellow rose, not a true rose but a small double blossom, like a rosette. It had come from Grandma's, a cutting. I don't suppose it was in bloom when Jess came.

My mother said Jess had made her bed and would have to lie in it. Maybe she *said* that to the rest of us later; she didn't say much that day. I was just a little tot. Grandma and Jess got her clothes and went on. I cried.

"Maybe they thought she was pregnant already," I said. I didn't know I was saying it so anyone could hear me, till

Libby said, "Who?" She was sitting here in my room, fixing my dress. My girls came yesterday, I think that was when it was, and they brought me some cologne. Not Chanel; it might be another French name; the French scents are the best. Years ago I used Coty's Emeraude and Houbigant's Three Flowers bath powder. They took my mother some whisky for her heart in her old age, Four Roses, and sometimes she got mixed up and called it Three Flowers, after the powder. Yesterday they brought me some shoes, too, British Walkers, a good brand. Harlan, my husband, used to say a pair of fifty-dollar shoes would outlast two pairs of twenty-five dollar shoes. Back when fifty dollars meant something. He never bought cheap things; he had a store and he knew merchandise.

Libby said, "Who?"—sitting here, working on my dress. "Your Aunt Jessie," I said. She smiled. She smiles at things from a long time ago. "I dreamed about her," I said. "Well!" she said. "No good without a rope and bucket," I told her.

For a long time I held it against my mother, held it against both my parents that they didn't tell Jess to come home and stay. But there were a lot of us, and we were not rich. And they knew she might be pregnant already, and if she had had a baby there at home, people would say she was never married. We wanted to be somebody! Later Vera went to college so she could teach school; she sent her laundry home in a laundry mailer. Undine took a business course and worked as a bookkeeper. There were a lot of us—Jessamyn, Ophelia, Vera, Cornelia, Undine, and me; two boys, Wriston and Aylmer.

My mother gave us pretty names, but they went out of style.

Libby was fixing my dress; she said it was too long. Skirts are shorter now. I said, Take it up; I don't want to be out of style. Back at Joppa Church when I was growing up, you used to see these slouchy-looking old women in long skirts away down yonder—*droll*, my mother called them. I certainly wouldn't want to be out of style, I said.

Libby takes after her father's people; big, light blue eyes, like Harlan's oldest sister—her name's on the tip of my tongue. They said she was the prettiest girl in town: she had things from their store. Their house had a little tower, like a steeple. Whenever we came into town, when I was small, I stared at it; I thought for quite some time that it was a church. They said later that that oldest sister's daughter was a little wild; they talked about her. But they were all well-to-do, so no one really looked down on her. Money sanctifies.

I saw Harlan's sisters at a party, the first party I ever went to in town; somebody told me who they were, and said that was their brother over yonder. I said, "Who, *him*?" Just like that. They laughed at me about that later, when he started coming to see me. Harlan Everist. They sat up and took notice when he started coming around!

He's dead now. Five years; it might be more, time gets away so. Once in a while it slips my mind for a moment. Just for a split second. When there's something I want to tell him, something that's bothered me, or something that'll surprise the daylights out of him, I think, wait'll I tell Harlan.

There're so many gone on—more I know in the obituaries than anywhere else in the paper. My girls frown when I say that.

Harlan never cared much about going down to Jess's. Oh, he could talk to all kinds, he was a merchant, he knew how to do that. He'd go out to the barn with them and smoke his cigar and offer cigars around, and he usually thought to take chewing gum for the children. But it was a fairly long drive. And we hated to see how they lived—crops planted right up to the front porch, rusty screens all torn, bellying out from the windows, back porch rotting at the edges, old iron washpot out in the backyard. Everybody had one of those washpots once, but times have changed; people have machines now. It was going back to the old days, that's what it was. The ladies would be dipping snuff, and if we left the porch and went inside, they'd have to get the spitbucket, some old can full of ashes. Anyway, Earl might start drinking if too much company came; he kept his bottle at the barn, when he had one, and any excuse to pass it around. Jess's family looking at him: that was enough to make him drink, I suppose. Not social drinking, like they do now, sitting around the living room with their glasses and ice cubes, like my son-in-law. In the old days they passed around the jug and got roaring drunk—they didn't have any *ice*—and the wives and children had better watch out! Jess came to a family reunion once with a black eye; Earl had been drunk the night before. Sometimes, praise be, she came to the reunion without him, after the boys got big enough to drive a car. And after they got big enough they wouldn't have let him black her eye.

I went down there to see her once on the spur of the moment. I'd had a dream about her, just like last night, or was it night before last?—and I had to go see about her, for my own peace of mind. Harlan was off on a buying trip. Buzz had a half-holiday at school; he'd just learned how to drive, and I didn't have to ask him twice if he'd take me down there. He was still kid enough to like it out in the backwoods, with the dogs and guns and all.

Out on the road, I tried to hold him back, but we made good time, extra good time, it was what you might call a flying trip. September; warm; a pretty day. It takes a pretty day to make that upper South Carolina country look like anything—fields and fields, flat as your hand, and those gray, worn-out houses. And the windows of those houses—there's something empty and bleak about them; they make me think of disappointed eyes.

They were out on the back porch, Jess and her widow daughter-in-law, the son that died's wife—she stayed on with Jess and Earl. They were cutting up apples to dry. Jess was flustered. She didn't know what to think, she said later, big car driving up; it scared her. She was maybe a little grayer since the last reunion she'd come up for; some teeth gone, so that her smile looked like a kid's, one that's losing teeth; it was a kind, timid smile.

I wouldn't let them quit work, I put a dishtowel over my lap and went to work too. We talked about everything under the sun. She told me about the time Mamma made a carpet for the back room out of feed sacks, seamed them together and splattered Diamond dye on them with a broom: it was something she'd read in a farm magazine. We talked about the dances they used to have out in the empty tenant house. The Kissam house. She said my mother enjoyed the dances as much as anybody. Jess remembered jokes from back then. One about a man that couldn't read—made me think of Earl, *he* couldn't half read. Now they'd call it something else; they wouldn't just say he couldn't read.

So we sat there on the porch, cutting up apples. The daughter-in-law was a big fleshy girl—tongue-tied, but she opened up after a while. She was perspiring, the way fleshy people do, and I thought, why didn't I bring them a little gift, some bath powder or toilet water; I probably had some Avon stuff I'd never opened. I could see she looked up to Jess, and that Jess was the one around there that knew how to *do*. The daughter-in-law insisted on me tasting some of the grape pie Jess had made for dinner. In the kitchen they had an old holey tablecloth thrown over the table, over the plate of biscuits and the bowls of vegetables and the preserves and the sugar bowl—to keep off the flies, I guess, like a long time ago. There were some flies buzzing around, and Jess picked up the swatter and said there hadn't been *nary* a one in there when they sat down to eat. *Nary*—my son says it comes from *ne'er*, a corruption of *never*. He reads up on things like that. You hear people say it as a joke sometimes. I didn't like to hear Jess say it, though.

I ate the pie. It was no better than I could have made at the time, but good. Then we went back out to the porch. We talked and talked.

One spring day Jess's little grandson caught a rabbit in his rabbit box, and she skinned and dressed it for him. She had a cut on her finger, and the rabbit was carrying a disease. She got rabbit fever. Oh, she was sick; they took her up to Charlotte to the hospital, but they couldn't save her. She suffered. We all went over to see her.

Later I thought: rabbit box! How long since I've seen one? And she saw that child every day or two. Well, one of my granddaughters comes to see me quite often; one of the boys, too, but not that often, they say there's nothing for him to *do* here, and they're afraid he'll make me nervous. He buys me nice presents. My son and his family live in Charleston, and when they live a long way off it can't be helped. Charleston is a beautiful town. And I don't want to skin rabbits, I never did, and my grandchildren will keep their teeth and have more opportunities; they can be somebody. But I felt *something*, about the rabbit box, and the grandson, living right down the road from her. And the dead son's wife living in the house with them—it was a good-sized house, if ramshackle. There was a ladder lying on the roof every time I was ever there, as if they had to get up there a lot and patch it. Poor but happy? Don't you believe it. But they were there together, they were close, and they depended on her.

We went to the funeral, of course, down in that little old South Carolina church. Looked a lot like Joppa Church when I was growing up, like a house a child drew. Joppa was historic, and I loved it, but they've remodeled now. So they buried her down there, in the middle of May; the cape jessamine in bloom. I've never liked the smell of it since. Hot. I remember saying to sister Undine, "You'll burn up in that Butte Knit," and she said, "I'm wearing it for Jess, that's all I can do for her now, wear my good dark suit."

I can remember enough.

Where do all the souls go to wait for Judgment Day?—I used to wonder. People don't talk about heaven and hell as much any more. It's gone out of style. Some of the preachers on TV do; I listen to them once in a while. And space travel, the planetes out there—that's given me hope. All the undiscovered worlds.

They were legally married, Jess and that man, even if she was only fourteen. I suppose that's why they didn't tell her to come back home to stay. "They were legally married," I said out loud, before I realized it.

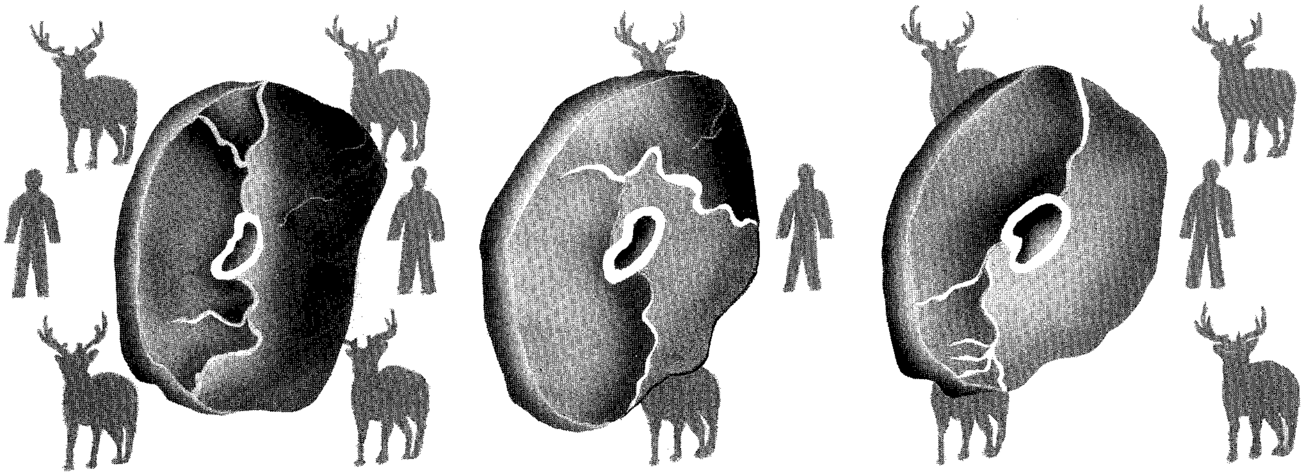
"Who?" Libby said. So I told her about Jess. She'd heard it before, but not to pay much attention to; it was not something to be proud of. She listened, and shook her head. She cut off the thread and stuck the needle back in my red emery pincushion. "What a shame! They ought to have let her come back! You'd think he'd have been ashamed, running off with somebody that young. It ought to have been against the law."

"I don't know," I said. "Not everything bad is against the law."

"It was too bad; I'm sorry. I know you missed her." I was glad I had told her how it was.

I didn't tell her all about the dream, though. Later, I had my bath—there's a nice aide that helps me with it; this is not my home, but I live here. After I had my bath and put on my bath powder, I lay in bed and thought about my dream. Jess was at my door, back at my house; she said she had come to take care of me, since Mamma and Papa weren't here to do it. "I am alone in the world," she said, "and I've come to take care of you." But in the dream we got younger; we were back at home, before we married, trying our fortunes. You know, you write your name down along with a boy's name, and you mark out the letters you have in common, and what you have left, you count off: Friendship, Courtship, Love, Marriage, and whichever it ends on is your fortune. I don't remember any names we used. But we were there on the front porch, behind the morning glory vine, the mulberry tree still there by the road. Then almost at the same time there was a big reunion dinner, out on tables under the mulberry tree. It was somehow like church homecoming, too; I don't know why I thought so, except that there would always be dinner on tables under the trees there too.

I lay in bed, and thought of my dream. I thought of the undiscovered planets far out in space, the worlds beyond the skies. It gives me hope. □



SAMUEL CAMERON

OPENING DAY

by Nicholas Hershenow

In October the aspens are yellow, the maples turn red, there are frosts each night and a couple of inches of snow cover the high cirques and passes. A huge orange moon floats along the ridgetops. We fall asleep with the smell of pine and smoke and horses in our nostrils, listening to the wind in the trees and the horses stirring. When we awake the horses are quiet, the moon is white, there is no wind. The forest paths are silent. When the sun strikes the highest peaks our guns explode the silence, and buck deer leap and crumple in the glades and on the steep open slopes of the mountains.

That's how it's been for 150 years; that's what the old men remember, and what the children imagine. The deer hunt is an heirloom linking distant generations, containing the legacy we inherit and pass on: freedom, solidarity, the will to survive and prosper, and the skills to subdue the wilderness which still seems to surround us.

That legacy is constant, but everything else changes. Even the deer hunt changes, though in ways that somehow never really matter. It doesn't matter that we are city dwellers who have lost the tracking skills of our forefathers, since we are now able to overwhelm the deer with sheer numbers—hundreds of thousands of us go into the mountains in October, and a buck stands little chance of avoiding the onslaught. It doesn't matter that our camps are often trampled and littered, since our cans and bottles, even our cigarette butts, will become relics for our grandchildren to discover, as stirring and historic as old mine tailings, square nails, and ancient rifle shells are for us. It doesn't matter that the deer hunt, a means of survival for our ancestors, is in a sense a luxury and financial liability for us. The cost of hunting supplies and game management does far exceed the value of the venison crammed in our freezers. But some of us earn what others spend, and all of us profit from the tremendous boost to our economy that is a result of this cycle of buying and selling.

Neither does it seem to matter that there is such a crowd of hunters now, nor that the large numbers of children we have produced point to an even greater hunting pressure in the future. The hunt becomes more of a slaughter every year, but thanks to our wildlife management programs and the elimination of non-human predators the deer population is far larger than it was when this country truly was a wilderness. In fact, it is only the hunt that keeps the population in check, saving tens of thousands of deer from death by starvation, while at the same time selecting for a stronger, more cunning breed.

But the snows this winter have been heavy, and the forage in the mountains is buried. The deer have come down to the foothills and valleys in search of food. The valleys, however, have long been settled and paved over, and in recent years housing tracts have spread up into the foothills as well. Gaunt deer browse on domestic shrubbery, and scrape away the snow to graze on lawns. Bands of confused deer clatter along the streets at night, and sometimes step out into the highways and boulevards, where they are mesmerized by automobile headlights. In the mornings there is blood in the dirty snow along the sides of the highway, but the bodies are gone. Fresh venison is a rare treat in January.

Many deer have gathered in the cemetery, which is as old as the earliest settlements here and has grown with the city; the trees are huge over the oldest graves, and up in the foothills new graves and saplings sprawl into the subdivisions. The deer browse on the young trees and on bouquets of flowers they find beneath the snow, wilted and frozen but still sweet. The snow has been scraped away from many of the graves, the flowers have been eaten, the grass nibbled down to its roots. Some of us are offended by this, but others enjoy walking in the cemetery at night, where the deer stand as still as tombstones, watching us, and disappear suddenly into the trees if we come too near.

An inversion fog settles over the valley, trapping the cold and the snow, and in the fog objects become difficult to distinguish: standing still the deer blend with the tombstones, and when they move we perceive motion but not form. We see shadows and sense their grace, and imagine the ghosts of our ancestors moving with renewed spirit and beauty through the winter night.

But the deer are starving. If nothing is done most of the herd will be dead by spring. A rescue effort is organized, and the plight of our deer is publicized throughout the country, in an effort to obtain donations and government funds to buy feed for them. In the meantime we chase deer out of our yards, and take our children to the cemetery to watch deer scrape and dig. The snow is scraped off most of the graves now, the flowers and grass are gone, and still we find shallow pits marked with hoofprints. They are making their beds more comfortable, we tell the children, or hoping to find roots and tubers, or more flowers, beneath the dirt.

With each day the fog thickens, and the deer seem tamer, or maybe just weaker. They allow the children to come very near, and then move away unhurried into the trees. When we keep our distance they lie in the shallow pits and turn their heads slowly to follow our movements. The fog is so thick that even by day they are only silhouettes and shadows; we can't make out their features at all, and have to imagine the expression starvation has given to their fluid brown eyes.

We come upon an excavated grave, with the metal coffin dented in several places. We check the coffin for fingerprints, and examine the surrounding earth and snow for suspicious tracks or other signs. Deer tracks are everywhere, but the deer themselves are like mirages that seem to be drawn towards us at first, and then recede and dissolve as we approach them. In the vicinity of the open grave we find fresh human footprints, which lead us to a couple of transients, sleeping in a glade beneath piles of newspapers and cardboard boxes. They're so cold and drunk they can hardly stand, and confess only to having stolen a sackful of deerfeed.

Another excavated grave is found. The coffin is wooden, and it has been split open, as if by a heavy blow. The corpse inside seems to have been tampered with, ripped apart a little, but it's too decomposed to tell for sure. We sweep through the cemetery, and in the remote sections discover more open graves. The metal coffins are dented, the wooden ones smashed open. Clearly, much of the flesh on the fresher corpses has been ripped away.

The cemetery is blanketed with guards, and most of the deer move out into the streets. They roam along the cemetery boundaries, nuzzling the snow. Some of them stamp the ground like horses. But beyond that they seem to have no strength or will, and barely stir themselves to move out of the paths of the patrols we send out, armed, into the cemetery and surrounding neighborhoods.

For several days we find nothing of interest, aside from a number of dead deer, the victims of starvation. Then one evening, just after dark, a patrol comes across a boy's warm body, lying in bloody snow a block below the cemetery. His forehead is smashed in, and most of his flesh is gone.

We keep our children inside now. We fear the fog, we fear the gunshots that ring out in the cemetery. Poachers, some of us think, poachers and bloodthirsty childkillers in our midst, and what are the police doing? Kneeling in the snow behind gravestones, leveling our rifles at shadows that blend with the fog when the rifles boom. One of the shadows staggers and collapses, and it's strange to draw near and see a doe take form, after all these weeks of seeing the deer as specters, without substance or color. Now even in the flat dim light there is plenty of color. The doe's blood is a brilliant red, her coat is tawny, her eyes are deep brown and shining with terror. We take the luster out of them with a bullet to the brain. The deer's stomach is sent to the lab, but the report will be anticlimactic: we saw the long pointed canines when her jaw went slack, we ran our fingers along the cutting edge of her yellow incisors.

Two more dead and mutilated children are found near the cemetery. In a panic we lock ourselves in our houses, repeating rumors, listening to and doubting official warnings, official reassurances. Many of us cannot believe that deer have acquired a taste for human flesh, that they rip up graves, that they have grown carnivorous teeth and prey on children. We blame the deaths on a psychopathic killer and his accomplice the fog. The fog isolates us, and in our isolation we are vulnerable to many kinds of insanity. We struggle to maintain contact with each other, keeping our televisions on all day, talking compulsively on our telephones. But looking out our windows we can barely see our neighbor's houses, and beyond these nearest houses there is only the static fog, confronting the most irrational and terrorized aspect of our imagination.

A long line of hunters moves across the cemetery, shooting at any shadow that seems to move. Several hunters are injured by bullets ricocheting off gravestones, but we kill many deer, and drive the rest back into the hills, or down into the heart of the city. With dogs and infrared sensors we stalk them through the back alleys, the fields, parks, and dumps, into the alcoves of apartment buildings where old people lie like carrion outside their doors, across the railroad tracks and through the bare trees by the river, where dismembered transients lie in the dirty snow. In the fog it's difficult to get a clear shot, but we manage to kill a few deer. Each one has long canines and sharp incisors in its mouth, and human meat digesting in its stomach.

With as much bitterness as horror we contemplate the extent to which the deer have turned against us. We have always thought so highly of these deer, admiring their swiftness and grace, the delicate beauty of the does, the majesty of the bucks and the rich wild taste of their flesh. Our hearts softened every time we saw spindly-legged fawns at play in the meadows. When the deer were starving our sympathy was sincere, and our attempts to save them were motivated as much by pity as by the concern that they would die of hunger before we could shoot them next fall. How are we to comprehend their vicious ingratitude, what are we to make of deer who are traitors, who have broken faith with a long-established and mutually beneficial relationship?

There are those who suggest that what has happened to us is not entirely unnatural. We are part of a biological system, a cycle of death and regeneration which is always seeking new ways to balance itself. The deer are only doing for us what we do for them—checking our procreative excesses, keeping us within bounds we have not yet learned to recognize ourselves. This argument is not popular among those whose own procreation has been checked in this way. In fact, very few of us are able to regard deer who eat humans as simply a mechanism of population control, any more than we are able to indulge in the speculation that arises late in the summer, with hunting season approaching and the annihilation of the deer herd almost complete—talk of reëstablishing the herd with a harmless, imported breed. There are too many fresh graves in the cemetery, and too many desecrated old ones, to even consider allowing deer back into our midst. Still, it's hard to believe that soon we will no longer be hunters. Perhaps we should find a new quarry, an animal more compatible with our time in history, with the way we actually live, rather than the way we occasionally dream of living. Why not turn cows loose to graze all summer in these high pastures, and then take a week or two of Indian summer to gun them down? We could pick them off from our lawn chairs, without even setting down our gin-and-tonics, and we would be killing them not out of soul-staining vengeance or some perverse one-sided conception of sport, not even out of a misty nostalgia for a frontier we have never been able to imagine with any clarity, but simply because someone is going to kill them anyway, and it's more pleasant to do it here in the meadow, with the smell of pine and gun oil in our nostrils, the taste of gin or whiskey in our throats, the aspens golden, the full moon sinking over distant ridges and the sun rising behind snowdusted peaks.

But this is only idle musing, the drift of conversation around an October campfire. Conjecture dies away, the fire is only coals, and there are only icy stars above our heads—no dreamy hunter's moon, no soft early snow. A slivered moon rises just before dawn, and frost coats our sleeping bags and gun cases. In the frost on the edge of the meadow there are deer tracks, the first sign we have seen for months. We follow the tracks up the canyon for miles before the sun is high enough to melt them, and by then we have come into a cirque, and it's too late for this last deer. She's leaping through the rocks on the other side of the cirque, climbing to an impossible pass, an impossible vision of freedom. Our rifles come up to our shoulders, the deer comes into our scopes: we observe the tautness of her muscles as she pauses, the smooth sweep of her turning neck. We squeeze our triggers, and she is blown out of our field of vision. Through the scopes we see only a talus slope, compressed and empty, rocked by a sound like a mountain exploding: the sound of our guns, booming off our shoulders and off the walls of the cirque, all going off at once on opening day. □

J.P. WHITE

APPLE BLOSSOM, ORIOLE, LILAC

for David Mura

The empire in confusion. Loss of memory.
A polished agenda broken from its laws.
Still, May returns with a readiness for creation,
The stars arranged by zodiac as if in final greeting
And farewell, the living stuff of both
Having skittered from the egg. Now, the modest
Ornaments of our garden dangle into view—
Apple blossom, oriole, lilac. A jubilation
For these agile gifts speeds across the dreamer's face
Nestled in peppergrass—there, in the hand, suddenly,
Proof of Paradise, the flower Coleridge presented
As a pledge of having braved the severed upper realm
And returned. All this blossom-knowing
With God in exile, roving like us up the manifold
Tableau of the universe. Only how could it be
To contain at once the Five-Petaled Mist
Of the Apple Blossom and The Gathering of the Sparks,
Each of us a fire, as Heraclitus said,
Mixed with spices and named according to a scent
Caught in smoke? Here, in my country,
There is little heart found in the upright,
Heaven-facing fathers, while, overhead,
The oriole suspends a pendulous nest
On the swaying outer branches of the cottonwood,
And abroad, one more lyrical revolution
In love with fraternity, devours its own children,
Forgets the purple lilac found in the moist clay
Of the village church. This season,
No country on the tilted axis will accept,
As proof of paradise, the poverty of our ideas—
Apple blossom, oriole, lilac. Only the animals
Waltzed through storybooks may come to drink
Of these scents, come at last in pairs
When the night holds sway over the bowed head,
And the garden is free of strangers.

TIMOTHY EARP

NO MORE

John L. Phillips

Tom Quinion's wife went made by degrees, and when she finally had at him with a carving knife he put his money in his pocket, locked the door to the livery stable and left. His oldest son, Bill, who was 27, said he wanted to go along, and Tom said that would be all right.

On foot they moved north and west, through Litchfield County, up past Torrington and Salisbury and into New York near Copake Falls. In Canaan, on a remote outcropping called Dean Hill, just east of the Massachusetts, line, they saw and bought the abandoned Kirby place.

The farm's long untended fields had gone to second growth, mainly alder and sumac. With hand tools and with implements drawn by a team of chestnut yearlings, they gradually cleared and reclaimed their 40-odd acres. They began grubbing out a side-hill living—hand-planting corn, stocking Rhode Island Red laying hens, building up a modest herd of scrawny Black Angus—that would carry them for more than 20 years.

The Quinions lived alone. Their weathered farmhouse had no electricity, telephone or plumbing. Half of it was a toolshed that also held their small assemblage of hunting rifles and traps. In the kitchen was a dry sink, a table with two stools, a wood-burning stove and two kerosene lanterns. Off the kitchen was a room with two mattresses on the floor. The walls were hung with coonskins. The house smelled of urine.

As time passed, father and son fell into the rhythms of subsistence farming. They worked until daylight failed and they slept from darkness to dawn. The first one in from the fields did the cooking. They mostly ate vegetables, fried potatoes, corn fritters and flat, heavy bread. When a cow died they chopped it up right away and lived high for a while, but most of the cattle were sold at the Chatham auction, which Bill attended every year.

Every two months Bill hiked or snow-shoed to Canaan, eight miles away, for provisions—flour, raw sugar, lard, kerosene—and the mail, usually a pennysaver and sometimes a Sears, Roebuck catalog, which he glanced at and then threw away. He also had an egg route along the Lebanon Valley. He walked it once a week. When the gunnysack of egg boxes was empty he cut cross-country straight back to Dean Hill.

Once a year Bill walked the 15 miles to Pittsfield to pay the farm's taxes and to put the rest of the egg and cattle profits in the bank. The pink deposit slips from Berkshire Bank & Trust were the only pieces of paper in the house.

For all his walking Bill stayed a roundish man with chubby arms and a muffin face. His father, four inches taller at six feet even, was flat and thin and hard. His sharp face was even more angular under his ratty felt hat. Bill was partial to a long-billed railroad cap.

Tom never left the hill. He said he was content where he was. The closest he ever came was when a young candidate for a minor judgeship came up scouring for votes. During the halting conversation the Quinions asked how long his opponent had been in office. The man said 12 years, which brought father and son simultaneously up from their stools; in their experience, political longevity was a guarantee of villainy. Tom said he'd go down into Canaan and register, but on Bill's next trip for staples he convinced the town clerk to let him register for his father. In the fall he cast his own vote and proxied for Tom.

The Quinions were suspicious of the outsiders who from time to time showed up on the hill. Some of them asked about the availability of parts of the property, which to the east commanded a handsome view of the Berkshires. Tom painted and staked up a couple of board signs, one by the house and one near the barn. They read: SNAKE KEEP OUT. The Quinions had the notion that most visitors were sharpers who knew for certain what they themselves only suspected: that there was vast mineral wealth—uranium, probably—all over the hill.

They had learned of the existence and importance of uranium only by chance. In the mid-fifties an NBC executive who owned adjacent property hired them to mow his fields. In payment he gave them two portable radios. The Quinions were fascinated. For months they sat at opposite ends of the supper table, each listening to his own radio. When the batteries went dead, they threw the radios away.

The Quinions trusted, even liked, people they knew. A neighbor who used to slog up through the drifts unannounced around Christmas with a Mason jar of maple syrup once mentioned he was thinking about planting a vegetable garden in the spring. One day the next April, the Quinions appeared on his property with their team and plow. Tom asked the man where he wanted that garden he'd been talking about.

Certain neighbors were allowed to hunt coon on the hill—they were fair game, Tom said, because they got in with the chickens and corn—and periodically a hunter brought them liquor. Confronted by a jug of any size, the Quinions finished it off on the spot, although they disapproved of "drinkers."

Tom Quinion was 84 when he died. He had put in a full day's work, but had eaten little that night and was too weak to get up the next morning. Two days later Bill walked to the firehouse in West Stockbridge and said his father was dead. Before he died, Tom had told Bill how he wanted his funeral to be.

On the following Monday, then, with a heavy mist and a sporadic downpour obscuring the farm's shoulder mowings lower down, Bill went out to the barn and hitched the ancient workhorses to the newly painted flatbed wagon. He headed the team for the house, where he carefully backed them up to the small side door. He eased the dark gray coffin, made from spare barn siding, off its saw-horses and onto the flatbed and then swung a tarpaulin across the wagon's ridgepoles. In the coffin were Tom, his hat and hunting rifle, a few rounds of ammunition, some candy and a tin of tobacco.

Bill had dug the grave beneath a butternut tree sixty yards from the barn. Under the tree huddled 27 people, the largest gathering on the hill in years. Next to the grave was a Mason jar of zinnias.

Bill moved the wagon up. He stayed seated as the local Congregational minister climbed up, stood on the tailboard and, rain dripping from the brim of his hat, read briefly from the Bible. Then Bill got down and moved aside the planks that had been covering the grave. He and the minister and two neighbors in coveralls lowered the coffin. Bill unhitched the horses and led them to the grave; they stood for a time, he quieting them in the rain, and then he gave them each an apple. Bill put the horses back in their traces, climbed into the wagon and clucked softly. Letting the reins trail, he cantered the rig back across the meadow to the barn. The people drifted away.

Tom had been explicit about his grave: It was to be well secured. Within half an hour, a truck from Canaan Cement & Gravel was laboring up Dean Hill. It maneuvered gingerly into place and poured five cubic yards of concrete over the coffin.

Bill had to wait eight months before the right buyer came to him, one who would pay for the farm in cash and who would let him keep title to the half-acre with the butternut tree at its center. When the deal was closed and he had the money in his pocket, Bill left without telling anybody where it was he was going. ☐

PATRICIA CLARK

WINTER LANDSCAPE, MISSOULA

Only the black-capped chickadee stays behind
    in pines edging these roads.
Stalled in drifts and lowering valley fog,
    landmarks whited out, I try
accepting notions of fenced land and a woman
    keeping one man warm, for a season.

Once, I tried to love a man into loving me.
    I spent years afterward learning
how to leave. There was always distance
    making me sad, rooms we lived in
without heart or heat. Sometimes he comes
    back in dreams, a woman blonde

and laughing on his arm. Here the river runs
    under ice, and all month,
thinking of my own death, how little
    it would matter, I went out
each morning and shovelled snow off the walkways
    and the car, snow that fell in darkness.

Blue car, blue light inside, how easy
    to lie down cold in cold.
Sometimes, in other dreams, he stands
    between me and whatever it is
I'm afraid of. It stays, in shadow, when I wake.
    There are distances to cross,

house to snowbound car, a woman
    talking to a man in bed.
My breath plumes in thin air as I leave
    in the morning, everything
drifted out of shape, the trees still
    in the yard, with bare, lifted limbs.

Coming from the Country

SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS

When my family packed up and moved from the backwoods of Tennessee to the backwoods of Ohio I was not quite six years old. Like most children at that age I was still a two-legged smudge. Hardly a thing about me was definite except my way of talking, and that soon landed me in trouble. The kids in Ohio took one listen to my Tennessee accent and decided I was a hick. They let me know their opinion by calling me not only hick but hillbilly, ridge runner, clodhopper, and hayseed. (Our language provides about as many ways of calling somebody a yokel as of calling him a drunkard.) To my southern ears, *they* were the ones who sounded funny. But they had me outnumbered. So with cheerful cruelty they danced in circles around me and mimicked my drawl. In school, whenever I had to answer a teacher's question, they would echo my words and hoot with laughter. The only southerners they had met before were Kentuckians and West Virginians who had moved north when the Appalachian coal mines shut down. These Ohio kids lumped all southerners together under the heading of hillbillies, and regarded us all as the scum of the earth.

I wasn't comfortable in the role of scum of the earth. At first I tried fighting, swinging at anyone of any size who mocked me. The mockers gleefully hit back, of course. After having better sense pounded into me, I made a discovery that chameleons and turncoats have known for ages: I would be safer if I blended in. From that time on, whatever the Ohio kids mimicked in my speech, I simply erased. Out went "you all," "I reckon," "rode a fur piece," and "tote a poke of taters." I quit saying my southern "Yes, Ma'am" and "No, Ma'am" to the teacher, who had labeled me a smart aleck for pretending such politeness. Before long I was talking like a Midwesterner, bland and cautious, as if I were cupping a marble on my tongue. It is the dialect I still speak, although when I'm tired, or telling stories, or visiting with my southern kinfolk, or amorous, I slip back into the accents of Tennessee.

When my playmates quit mocking my speech, I thought I must surely have graduated from being a hick. But I had only quit sounding like a southern variety in order to begin sounding like a northern one; I had left one backwoods for another. In the years since that move to Ohio I've met enough purebred city people to realize that, however many layers of travel and booklearning I wear on my outside, down inside I am pure country. Since I'm now reasonably grown up, and still inwardly a yokel, I no longer expect to mature into a cosmopolitan. For better or worse, I come from the country, and lately I've begun to reflect on what this means.

Being a hick is less of a handicap than I once thought. It amuses my urban friends, it means I can leave my windows rolled down when I drive by pig farms, it allows me to ignore about half of what passes for modernity, and it supplies an excuse for a good many of my crotchets. Consider my habits of sleep, for example. I like to get up roughly when the sun does, and if sloth or a faulty alarm keeps me abed much later than seven I stumble through the day feeling out of sorts. This habit of rising early also means I turn into a sack of sawdust around ten o'clock at night, when my town friends want to go dancing. Knowing I'm a hick, they rib me a little and then let me shuffle off to bed.

Or consider—on my long list of rural crotchets—my dread of taxis. I will carry a suitcase and walk any distance to avoid hiring a cab. The first time I ever had the chance of hiring one was at the age of seventeen, when I went away to college in Providence. Fresh off the Greyhound bus after a ride of forty-eight hours, lugging a year's supply of goods in my grandfather's sea chest, I asked a ticket-seller where I would find the university. He pointed up a hill, but said it was too far to walk hauling such a big trunk, I'd better get a cab. I glanced warily at the row of dented yellow cars, each with its bubble on top and its flanks inscribed with the prices of various distances, then hefted the sea chest and trudged on up the hill. I haven't outgrown this phobia. Recently, in Baltimore, I was going out to dinner with some friends. Since there were nine of us, somebody ordered three taxis. Shy and backward, I stood aside while four of my friends got in the first cab and the remaining four piled into the second; when the last car drew up beside me I spun around and fled.

Now as it happens I enjoy using my legs and saving a dollar—two good reasons for avoiding cabs. But my difficulties with taxis lie deeper. I like to know where I'm going, and like to choose my own path for getting there. I hate sitting behind a driver who treats a crowded avenue as his private racetrack, shouting threats and blaring the horn. It is a torture for me to hear the meter tick and watch the odometer spin its numbers. I can't stand having time and distance parceled out that way, so many cents per click.

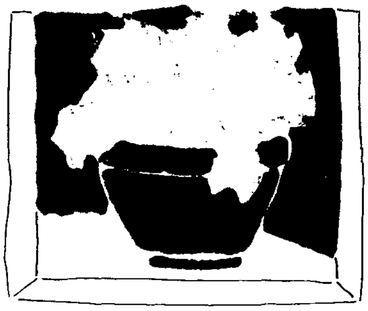
What bothers me even more, and not just in taxis, is to hire strangers to serve my needs. I don't like turning myself over to bellhops, waitresses, museum guides, barbers, or doctors unless I am on familiar territory and know the people I am dealing with. When I can't avoid staying in hotels, I mark myself out as a yokel by opening my own doors and carrying my own bags. I read the room service brochures with dismay. Imagine, leaving your dirty socks in the hallway and having them come back, discreetly perfumed, in a plastic sack the next morning. Imagine, ringing for a glass of milk at midnight. It's as if, through room service, you're invited to become a child again, to be waited on hand and foot without the trouble of coming down with fever.

When I can't avoid going to a restaurant, I sit there with my plate full of food cooked by somebody I've never seen, I watch the frazzled waitress dashing between tables with a coffee pot, her bangs stringy from sweat, and I feel like getting up and giving her my chair. For me there is something shameful in being pampered and catered to by hirelings, a hint almost of slavery. And there is something craven in paying others to do what you could perfectly well do yourself.

Now you will not get very far or rise very high in a city if you refuse to have people wait on you. Foolish as it may be, this inhibition has stuck with me from my country upbringing. Lack of money and distance from town meant that we looked after ourselves; we shopped once a week, and otherwise made do with what was in the house; we fixed what broke. My father and mother between them could mend anything from bluejeans to banjos, from televisions to fishing tackle. We never used the yellow pages. If some job needed doing that we lacked the skills or the tools for—shoeing our ponies, cleaning a septic tank—we got a neighbor to do it, sometimes for money, sometimes for labor or a bushel of sweet corn or a jar of strawberry jam. There was no bragging attitude of self-sufficiency behind this. It was simply how we lived, and how I learned to live. In the country most children are taught to see to their own needs, and when they can't handle the job alone they hunt up a friend.

If you're used to fixing and patching and making-do, you need spare parts, which is why a lot of country places look like salvage yards, with discouraged cars up on blocks, disemboweled washing machines and cement mixers on the porch, coils of wire and stacks of wood under tarps by the barn. Stores are a long way off, they may not have the part you need, and anyway they'll charge you for it. Better keep every scrap of metal and plastic and wood you can lay your hands on. And if you started to build a house but ran out of money and strength after finishing the basement and you're living down there under ground, or if you're cramped inside a sixteen-foot trailer and hope one day to surround it with weathertight rooms, that's all the more reason for saving junk. To a pair of city eyes, such a place looks squalid. To the folks living at the center of that pile, it's neither ugly nor lovely; it's just there, an orchard of human fruits ready for plucking in season. Since I don't have much land around me these days, I've turned my basement into a junkyard. Down there you will find pieces from every machine that has ever failed me, sheets of plywood and plasterboard, tiles, bricks, blocks, switches, parts I can't name from gismos I've forgotten.

The more I scavenge, the less I have to buy, which saves me confusion as well as money. When it comes to buying goods and services—the correct wine at dinner, a rental car, a shoeshine—city people always seem to me like clairvoyants, knowing every in and out, and I feel like an ignoramus. Take mixed drinks, for example. Everything I know about cocktails has to do with roosters. I come from a long line of drinkers, but whatever they drank came straight out of the bottle—beer, wine, whiskey. The first time I was roped into attending a fancy reception, I arrived hot and thirsty from a hard walk (avoiding taxis again), and a waiter sidled up to me with a trayful of drinks. It was plain he meant for me to take *something*, so I grabbed a glass of clear liquid and, thinking it was water, took an eager swig. It wasn't water. As nearly as I could figure, it was some concoction built around vodka. I held it in, but dared not speak for a long while.



The list of things I don't know how to buy is nearly as long as the list of things for sale. Digital stereos, lingerie for my wife, insurance, carpet, cheese. I find the ordering of meals especially grueling. My city friends know this instinctively, and so whenever I pay them a visit the first thing they say is, "Where shall we eat?" I suggest the kitchen, but they ignore me and begin reciting the names of ethnic restaurants. Even plain old American cafes are a trial and tribulation to me. If there are more than seven items on the menu I'll have to choose by pointing with my eyes shut. And even with seven dishes, chances are that five will be utter mysteries to me. I would rather plant and grow the food than figure out how to order it.

I'm also hopeless at buying clothes. My twelve-year-old daughter says I dress like somebody out of a time-capsule. It is true my wardrobe hasn't changed much except in the size of collars and pants-legs since I turned eight. (I have heard rumors that men these days sometimes go without collars altogether, but I started with collars and am sticking by them.) The only time I'm *à la mode* is when I eat ice cream on pie. In my defensive moods—which come over me occasionally, like the flu—I repeat Thoreau's dictum: "beware of all enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes." Like many folks whose tastes were formed in the boondocks, I'm not so much hostile to fashion as oblivious to it. The breezes of fashion blow hardest where people have time and money on their hands—two items in short supply in the country.

What I learned from growing up in the country is not how to buy things but how to *do* things: carpentry, plumbing, grafting, gardening, pruning, sewing, making hay with or without sunshine, cooking, canning, felling and planting trees, the feeding of animals and fixing of machines, electrical wiring, plastering, roofing. There is a rude balance in effect here, which prevents me from understanding half of what my city friends are talking about when I stay with them, but enables me to fix their toaster and jump-start their car. My clothes may be stodgy, but I can mend them. Restaurants may baffle me, but I know something about the raising of the cows and cabbages that appear under such mystifying aliases on the menu.

If I don't know how to do a job that needs doing in our household, my first thought is always to hunt up somebody who can teach me. To this day I still feel responsible for overhauling my house and car and for repairing whatever comes inside my four walls. This policy soon leads to grief. The second law of thermodynamics declares that entropy is on the increase everywhere, and the whole universe is drifting toward disorder. I can't vouch for the universe, but I know for sure that old houses and cheap cars fall apart faster than any mortal can patch them up. There are a great many more gadgets in my adult house than there were in my childhood one, and they break down in bafflingly novel ways. On the rear panels of most appliances, as you will have noticed, a label warns you not to remove the cover because there are no user serviceable parts inside. Instead, you are to ship the item off to qualified personnel, whose address, if provided at all, is usually in a city five hundred miles away. It galls me about as much to play the ignorant user as to play the scum of the earth. So when a gadget breaks down I brazenly undo the cover and poke about in the forbidden parts; and, lo and behold, about two-thirds of the time I can fix it. The other one-third of the time I am driven to despair.

My city friends avoid despair by renting apartments and turning their cars over to mechanics. Those brash enough to live in houses keep lists of plumbers, exterminators, chimney-sweeps, handymen, painters, electricians, gardeners, a whole army of attendants. When anything needs tending, they reach for the phone. I keep no such list. Occasionally, in a panic, I will open the yellow pages, but I quickly shut them again without dialing, appalled by the mere thought of all those strangers waiting out there to serve me. Actually, I don't like using a phone at all. Not because I have any grudge against the instrument itself—I can fix a telephone—but because I like to see the folks I'm talking to. Without a face and a breath attached to speech, I grow uneasy. It's like eating when you have a cold and can taste nothing.

Pushed to its ugly extreme, this cleaving of the world between neighbors and strangers becomes tribalism, a disease that is common in the country. I have seen crosses burning on the lawns of integrated schools, have listened to slander against Jews and Italians and Hispanics, have watched factory workers beat imported strikebreakers with shovels. I have been an outsider in too many places myself to underestimate the dangers of tribalism. But the prejudices of country people are limited by ignorance; you can't very well hate nations or religions you've never heard tell of. The crazy-quilt mixture of peoples in a metropolis may lead to wise tolerance, or it may lead to a more comprehensive brand of bigotry. I once knew a Chicago doctor, a descendant of the Old Testament Assyrians, whose roster of enemies included such Biblical remnants as Chaldeans, Babylonians, and Mesopotamians, as well as Zoroastrians and Swedenborgians.

This business of neighbors and strangers touches on another of my country oddities. My city friends describe their glee in watching eccentrics perform on street corners, in subways, in the lobbies of skyscrapers. The shaggy old man who wears a sandwich board and drools in his beard and proclaims the end of the world is a source of entertainment for them, part of the urban spectacle. But the sight of him makes me ache. I feel my way inside his dingy hide and share his apocalyptic dread. Mind you, I don't sidle up and talk with him. I keep my distance, afraid he might lay on me some enormous claim. By the end of a day in the city, identifying with drunks and prophets and twitching zombies, unable to help a single one of them, I feel battered and drained.

Back in my country childhood, there were so few people around, every one of them stood out for me as a person. The local eccentrics were also neighbors; I went to school with their children, picked apples for them, stood beside them in the hardware store, listened to their harangues on our front porch. I knew their life histories and learned, often, what ill wind had turned their minds in strange directions. To meet derelicts I didn't have to go cruising through the Bowery, or dress up in rags like George Orwell and sneak into a Parisian flophouse; there were derelicts enough living on our road, squirreled away in trailers and tar-paper shacks.

Our local prophet of doom was a carpenter with five children, one of whom, a gawky boy, was in my class at school. Every crazy word from the father left a shadow on the face of the son. When the carpenter received his message that the world was about to end, he stopped work on the family house, which was half-built, quit all his other jobs, and withdrew his children from school. As the date announced for the earth's demise drew near, the prophet grew frenzied, surrounded as he was by skeptics and sinners, and eventually he landed in jail. After the date passed and the world survived, the father was set free, but he never finished his house, never unbent from God's stiff wind; and the face of his son, my classmate, never uncrimped from the pain.

My trouble is, I hate turning other people into a spectacle, as if human beings were two-dimensional figures in a mural. For a short while I exult in the city's million faces; but soon those faces become as indistinguishable to me as dewdrops on the morning grass, and then I hurry back to a place where people are rare enough to have features and names. This withdrawal troubles my city friends. How can I survive without getting a daily look at Afghans or Sikhs? They count upon seeing the costumes and complexions of two dozen nationalities on their ride to work each morning. I will grant there is pleasure and the chance of wisdom in observing that human display. I say a chance rather than a certainty, because I notice that most of my friends do no more than look at these colorful strangers, never so much as exchange a word with them, and rarely see the same mysterious face two days running. I'm not convinced there is more pleasure or wisdom to be had from glimpsing two dozen nationalities of *homo sapiens* than from encountering on a day's walk fifty species of plants and animals. Do we have to stretch ourselves farther to appreciate a Tibetan, say, than to appreciate a turtle or a trillium? Notice I'm not saying that a wildflower is deeper or nobler than a Buddhist monk, but that a flower's inwardness is further from our own. When all is said and done, despite its heady mix of peoples, the city is filled with versions of ourselves; the country is likelier to confront us with true otherness.

I think we all could stand a good dose of otherness, to tell you the truth. I think we are far too full of ourselves. Walk around in a city, and everything you see, even the sickly tree corseted in an iron grate or the dog on a leash, is there by human design or sufferance. What wizards we are! Look at those skyscrapers! Listen to the roar of those engines in our concrete canyons! Behold the wonders for sale behind the plateglass windows! The executives who make the decisions that shape our lives gaze down from gleaming towers onto that scene. How can they help but regard themselves as gods?

You may point to museums and open-air markets—places I love to visit—but I believe the city's pure essence shows in office towers and shopping malls. Deep in the architects who design these enclosures and in the enthusiasts who frequent them—the skyscraper addicts and mall zealots—there is a horror of the nonhuman. A shopping mall is a space-age Garden of Eden. Everything needful sprouts on the shelves of stores, as if by spontaneous generation, lights defy the cycles of day and night, windows keep out bugs, and overhead the arched roof shuts out weather and wildness. Push the shopping mall one degree further and you have Disneyland, the urban dream of nature: sterilized dirt, paved walkways, rivers that flow in circles and never flood, mechanical beasts that roar on signal, grass and flowers chastened into purity by chemicals.

It is easy to pretend, in a city, that humans have made the world and dwell there alone. In the country, you know better. It's the difference between living in *a* creation and living in *the* creation. Life in the boondocks discourages you from claiming with a straight face that humans are omnipotent. If you think our works are mighty and permanent, drive down any back road and study the caved-in barns, the cellar holes grown up in thickets. If you begin to doubt we have companions on spaceship earth, try clearing a patch of ground beside a woods and gardening for a summer. Insects and worms and rabbits and raccoons and possums and beasts you never identify will gobble your plants; weeds and forest seedlings will sprout between your neat rows. Go away for a month and when you come back the woods will be occupying your garden plot. Of course we have devised ways of discouraging rabbits and chickweed. The manufacturers of poisons sell brews that snuff out everything except what we suffer to live, brews that incidentally, and more slowly, snuff us out as well. But this very willingness to poison whatever obstructs our schemes is a symptom of the arrogance for which life in the country is a good antidote.

When Hamlet speaks to Ophelia of "country matters," he means sex, fertility, the old sashay of the flesh. What else could the Prince of Denmark know about the backwoods? City people often think of the land rolling beyond the last streetlight as one vast breeding ground for soybeans and mistletoe, pulpwood and hogs. The folks who make their lives out there seem, from the city, more like pigs and pines than humans. When a writer needs a character to symbolize the animal within us—think of D. H. Lawrence, Tennessee Williams—he's likely to drag in a bumpkin with muddy boots and rural twang. If you write a novel about the backwaters and hope to make a splash in the metropolis, you had better feature incest and idiots.

Of course things do breed in the country—otherwise neither Hamlet nor the rest of us would have a bite to eat. And of course rural kids don't have to wait for high school health class or a chat with Mom and Dad to learn the alphabet of sex. I learned the rudiments with a bang, long before I was in a position to apply the knowledge, by raising rabbits. I observed the mechanics on a large scale every time we took one of our mares to visit the stud. I tassled corn and helped pollinate squash by poking the flowers with a feather. This knowledge of how animals and plants go about their business has not kept me from greatly enjoying the human version. If anything, it has deepened my pleasure to know that my loving a woman, and the whole amazing edifice of romance, is raised on such sturdy foundations.

It's true that culture is stretched pretty thin in the sticks. If you can't get through the week without seeing an opera or visiting an art gallery, you had better stay in the metropolis. I've noticed that my city friends are mostly consumers of culture, not creators, buying their way in just as they buy their groceries. Sometimes they talk as though a season ticket to the ballet makes them bearers of Western Civilization. Because the human net is spread so thin in the countryside, you realize you must help make and sustain it. Whatever happens on the back roads and in small towns—carnivals and spelling bees, parades and horse races, bluegrass concerts, open air theatricals—happens because people you know, or you yourself, make it happen. It is do-it-yourself culture, homely to be sure, but heartfelt and sprung from local talent.

Wayne Hogan

In the country, if things go undone, you can't blame officials. I know a carpenter who didn't see the point of joining the volunteer fire department until one day his barn started to smoke. His wife called the emergency number, a siren went off, and pretty soon the neighbors turned up with their pumper and hoses. They held off spraying long enough for the chief to ask, "What do you think about volunteering now?" and for the carpenter to reply, "I think now's a real good time." So he joined on the spot, grabbed a hose, and has remained a loyal volunteer ever since. It's good to feel responsible for the place you inhabit, and easier to feel that responsibility when the place is thinly settled.

Marx and Engels, those two quintessential urban visionaries, promised in their Communist manifesto that the world revolution would free all hicks and yokels from "rural idiocy." As someone who inherited a good dose of rural idiocy, I have to admit there is a core of truth in this contemptuous phrase. When I work all day in the sun pitching hay or driving nails or splitting wood, I slump down at night and live wholly in my body. On those nights the neighborhood dogs have livelier thoughts than I do. With or without a revolution, I'll remain backward and countrified. I'll never be urbane—the very word a reminder of how we equate refinement with the city. I'll never feel at ease living where the glare of lights keeps me from seeing the stars and where fear of strangers keeps me from walking out at night. A Tennessee ridgerunner accent still underlies my Midwestern prairie tones, a dirt-road soul shows through cracks in the paving of my education. The pleasures and knowledge that come to those of us who grew up in the country may be small potatoes compared to what city breeding offers, but in the long cold winter of cruelty and want that lies ahead for the world, we'll need all the potatoes we can find. □

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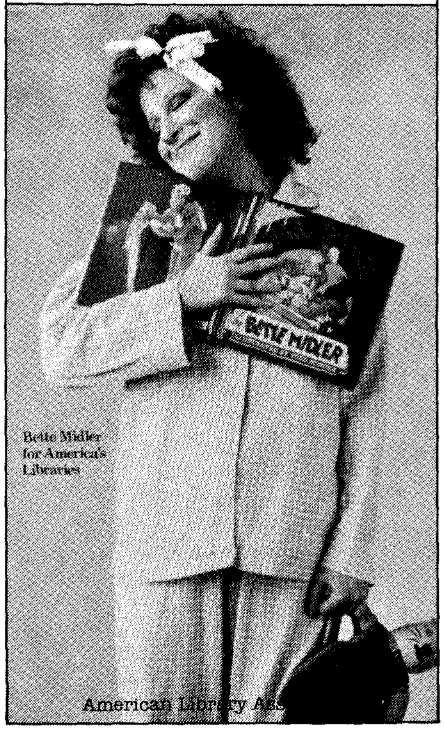

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FAMILIAR MATTERS

Living on the River

MARY PETERSON

November

When you live on a tidal river you come to see things in a different way. Lately the tides have been frighteningly extreme: at high tide the dock skews sideways and styrofoam kicks out from under the float. One end of the float tilts downward into the water; the other rears up and raises the stern of the Whaler where the boat is tied with nylon line. Water pools where it never does: inside the stones of the breakwater.

I stand on the float, the dog with me, and watch the swirling water. Leaves race past; the river is clear and I can see schools of nearly transparent fish and seaweed moving. My black cat sits at the head of the ramp, watching us.

At low tide the ramp is almost vertical down to the float and the dog's claws scratch and slide as she works her way toward the boat. The weedy mud flats stretch all along in front of the summer houses. The river looks like a moonscape, desolate, as though somebody pulled the plug.

On the water I feel a primitive kind of loneliness that I've never felt before — a feeling that would not be satisfied with ordinary activity, dinners out, visits with friends, a good book, a warm woodstove. I might as well be the only person in the world who is looking at this river.

Opposite our dock, on the other bank, is the town dock where fishermen with big rusty boats named *Judy Marie* and *Yankee* come in at any hour of day or night to unload their catch. I hear them at six in the morning when I first wake up: the throaty diesel engines and their voices over the river. Sound carries on water; I hear them shouting, swearing.

This house is rented. I moved here after I left a house I had owned, on Western Point overlooking the harbor entrance. During the first weeks here I took the Whaler to the mouth of the harbor just beyond the marina where a fierce tide pulls the big red channel marker underwater. From that place exactly I could look up and see my house — the house I left — set back in the trees. It's a grey saltbox with a dark roof and four skylights. If I had turned around, I could have admired a Friendship Sloop or a thirty-six-foot Morgan ketch.

Sometimes I took the boat out here at night to see if lights were on in my house. They never were. And after two weeks I stopped doing this because I knew I was testing myself.

This is the way water is, though: you hear across it the voices of people you would rather ignore, you see from it things you might rather forget, and you have a sense it could take you anywhere if you just gave in.

That's the reason I began taking the Whaler out of the mouth of the harbor and toward the beach where the boney ledges are just under the waves; began driving the boat fast in wide curves that threw a plume of white water from the stern. Away from the river the ocean opened outwards.

Also, I began going upriver in the evenings, where I would see blue and night herons and deer in the salt marsh grass. Maybe, I thought, I can do anything I want to do.

Yesterday I was home early from work. When I pulled up in front of the house I heard gulls calling from the town dock — maybe a hundred gulls — and a man in yellow foul-weather gear was throwing fish guts into the water. The gulls were flying into each other, screaming; they were floating in thick clots in the river, on the tide away from the dock.

I went down to the breakwater with the dog and watched them. The breeze was astringent. I listened to the fishing boat's engine, splashing of water as it poured from the bilges, men's voices blurred behind the noisy gulls. It seemed for a moment that everything was part of a single thing, and the birds were like pieces of the river screaming in the air. □

Orientprose

FREDERIC WILL

Moved toward first in the train from Ashikaga, waiting first in that little station which, for its crowding and country talk and coffee stand might have been American Midwest. Cut off into the country, which was knee-deep in rice-water, bright-green as a newt, utterly taken over by the human. Some hours went. Climbed. Got colder. It began to rain. The end of the line felt like the end of a logging-line. Huge ancient trees, planted by Toshuga Emperors. The town then small. Bought tea, put on long underwear. Nikko precinct still another half-hour by bus.

Getting there was not an amazement, but 'happened.' A Lourdes mood around the curio shops. The people older, hopeful, pious, some a little unsure of the way to the sanctuary. Me unamazed by the first views. By which time the train had started back. And I had begun the peristalsis, rice, lunch.

Before a photograph. Heart operative. Shoulder remembering the wall leaned against, a small kiosk, from where the shot was made. Eye on the shapes of people, loosely over the steps to the temple. Japanese shapes. The double-roofed temple slightly menacing, topping the scene. Mostly dark to the inside.

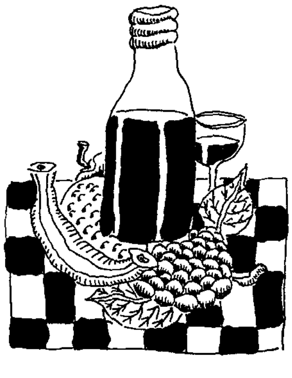
I am in it again. I had never 'been in a place like that.' Found the slippers. A low dense mat. What to say of the shaved monks praying, the crowd of polished ritual objects before the altar? They were not my language, pressed little. I went down the stairs.

The Three Buddhas could smash an eye. No one had told me. Huge and gold and not from the literature. I hung in them far from home. The immovable Buddha of compassion, Amida, soothing with finger pose; the thousand handed Buddha; the Buddha of silence . . .

It was a . . . terrible joke?

Three Buddha Temple. And now I want to say simply *the gold and the stillness and the darkness of timber and walking mystic through to the floor,* shoeless on the cool tatami . . . And some savor of innocence and power . . . And of the whole precinct. 'Altogether, it is said, 2,489,900 sheets (of gold) were used, each of 3.84 square inches, a quantity which would cover nearly six acres. The timber used in the buildings, it is estimated, if extended, would reach for 330 miles or somewhere near the length of the Tokaido Railway between Tokyo and Kyoto, while there must have been 15,000 men working on the buildings during the 12 years they took to erect.'

And from the train I had looked in vain for the timber. It was not extended. And higher, among the masses of pilgering school-children and the vast rocks and limetrees, the hearts of the precinct, bleeding their color on the rims of my eyes. A bloody surreal forest of pagodas, treasuries, shrines. Monkeys climbing like putti. Wrought, vascular pillars of gold. Gray-black stone mossy funeral lanterns. Over and over flames for the Tokugawa Shoguns, laid here then. Fistsize pebbles worn. An infinite shuttle of feet. All beyond Yomeimon, the Gate of Sunlight, itself a beyond of interlocking upswerving eaves and painted beams, to which only the most elemental torii had seemed fit prelude. Beyond Yomeimon the Toshogu Shrine, bitter orange flame. A 'Chinese Gate' before it. The true *geistiger punkt.*



Then shrines like Yumoto. I have its picture. It is still that faint drizzle, the Nanma still lies opposite, at the lake's other corner, the muscular twists of root still lie in abandon on every side, and threaten the already narrow path with their foliages' dechevelure. It is so right, the finding a shrine in those ashtreeclumps, that you resist. I remember what a storm and mist came up that day. Only that wrongness, that harshness, made the shrine possible.

So there is the torii, this time minuscule, crossed by sun and shadow and leaf patterns; torii somehow, in its simple geometry, bringing all the sumptuous unorder of leaves and branches to form around it. Then the small stone altar, behind. A Shinto saint there, and a pair of unidentified. The experienceable world drawn down suddenly to this focus of stone.

To this focus. A peepshow altar, at the Kasuga shrine in Nara. And when the god lies wafered in curtained sanctuaries? Say at Adorations? Seems to be that rascal the foxgod, one of whom, bush-tailed and sly-eyes, I stole from Ashikaga and observe on my mantel, one of whom I saw presiding over a TV set in a Kyoto restaurant, one of whom was seen winsome and adroit, pottery, in a businessman's front yard, Kyoto . . . Margin of the Shinto faith. A little orange box at Kasuga, too. It was an alley of funeral lamps, deer springing in and out of the air. I went over. The torii lacking. Grains of rice and a few cups of tea standing on the shelf before the locked box. The simplest of offerings. Within the box, beyond an aperture too small for a wren's embryo, the thin pottery fox. 'Unknown to me who resideth here; tears flow from a sense of unworthiness and gratitude.'

The gong. The gong. Such a stillness. Then some movement in the background, some shuffle of socks on tatami, and the monk of Churenji there. 'Quite unnecessary to speak.' With that silence we whipped one another. Whips of love.

The implements. Of address. Very low-relief Buddhist carvings. Boddhisatvas minted delicately out of the stone altar. Bronze cups and plates, polished into a fire. Flowers, a 'natural offering.'

And so, quite irresistibly, back again in the evening, asking to sit in the silence of rocks, as though it were to sit within myself, in a selfhood totally undifferentiated. Meanwhile the dog there barked. Yet ceased, and one was eased again into *wu-wei-wu*.

And kept in that presence temple after temple, finding it hardly believable, worthy of the finest accessions to death I had ever undertaken. Nanzenji having its way of being the best, its stonegardens cautiously daring, set in bonewhiteness against the weathered gray of the temple's wood. A restraint there which was in fact nothing but a limit to the one aperture, inward, through which everything could become visible. Like love seen. To which closing, nature too drawn, so that the flowers took on the 'color of the soul,' and the walls of the rockgarden lent down their own compassion. Nothing alien being left, all the corners being held, made sharply themselves.

As in the Koan. 'A master was having tea with two of his students when he suddenly tossed his fan to one of them, saying, "What's this?" The student opened it and fanned himself. "Not bad," was his comment. "Now you," he went on, passing it to the other student, who at once closed the fan and scratched his neck with it. This done, he opened it again, placed a piece of cake on it, and offered it to the master. This was considered even better, for when there are no names the world is no longer "classified in limits and bounds." '

Not even Lucknow, etc., to judge from the way, crossing from Delhi to Benares, everyone on the plane seemed turned in, self-concerned. Those sareed and negligent stewardesses, the rumpled *hommes d'affaires*, smoking, reading *The Hindustan Times*. How did they not notice my wonder, my wonder at the immensity of that plain, itself a chessboard of green, then brown, then green, flat, and endless either to north or south and as primally alluring as when Aryans first saw it, like Hannibal's men, like Cortez'.

What, though, was *there*? What were those mud shacks, clustered together like lonely people, far from each other those towns, self-protecting against god knew what dangers? I saw temples, from the air.

Over all of which Chakravarti, in the Embassy Cafe, bestowed wisdom. Having seen America as I saw India. Felt that 'we' had conquered, downed, thus lost the sense of, nature. (Of course he had missed many of our secrets, especially Nebraska, and Wyoming, and Montana, but he had done wonderfully with the rest). It was partly that we no longer, on the whole, feared natural disasters. (I told him about Hurricane Carla and the tornado at the Coralville Dam, yet he was basically right.) But it was more than that, and there he was even righter. We had come to feel great confidence that things men made could convey them through, elevate them over, the 'spontaneous' makings of a world which was only God's, but never man's, artifact. This confidence was crucial. Whereas the Indian, still annually exposed to the mass disasters of flood and famine, had no such confidence, and by a combination of necessity and wisdom put himself in the hands of destiny, for which he was amazingly clever at finding different names.

The Embassy Cafe meanwhile buzzing with the low voices of Aryans drinking iced coffees and reflecting blandly on the troubled course of neutrality. At which instant Sri Pal, in Benares, would have been bent over a tracing, not yet knowing I was in India, while he was completing his book on Nepalese iconography. In the American Academy of Benares. A Ganges away from the air-conditioned ices here in the Embassy. I thought, feelingly, something was coming. Benares. The fort against the terror of being.

For it was there. Pal is at his desk. Or is, let's say, there in spirit and I am again there in fact and it is nine a.m. and I am watching the Rewa Ghat, in its simple activities, from the intricately Moorish balcony of the American Academy of Benares. Simple activities: two women carrying bags of sand on their heads, from barges up to a retaining wall; a few kids swimming in muddy Ganges. A cow swimming there.

Hard to say the pleasure of that pleasure, after the hopeless despairing confusion of the streets. How had I gotten through them? Four men, carrying the saffron-clothed corpse of an old man, had cut in front of me. Children, pushing painted Siva altars in the Jagannath Festival, had taken up a main road brilliantly. Everywhere keepers of shops and shoppers had wandered over the divisions between houses, divisions we call roads, and with the camels and elephants had offered a blockade of existence to me and the pedicab. American Academy of Benares? It let itself be found at the end of a lane.

So I sat and wrote there on the Moorish balcony, and the servants brought me water constantly, and I imagined the Moghuls and watched the women carrying sand, and the old sumptuousness of the Ganges, and at ten Pal came. And the coolness of that whiteclothed refinement of being was the finest water. And in the evening, rowing beside the ghats and the palaces, we talked with a flowing of spirit which was easy, and for an instant I thought as purificatory, as that purpling river.

That they should be buried, correctly, stilly, and be thereby, by Ganges freed from the circuit of karma, the old came, and had filled this ancient city to the seams, and it was like the old in California, except that here they did believe that karma would yield. And they bathed with their cows in this release. And subtle Pal, when I asked him, would not say: 'This is wrong.'

And in fact something there reminded me of things so still and inward to me, like Arnold Arboretum, that it could never be a question of their rightness. Nothing could more noteworthily have been.

The silence in planned collections of trees, silence under the trees and deep in their order.

Heard in that 'famous' temple of Benares, where I was looking—on the level with it—along the relief map floor of India, seeing the low breasthills rise across the north then rise farther until the whole horizon was heeled with peaks, and the groundfloor walls of the temple were nearly hidden. Not amusingly, as that seemed because it was bizarre. Yet bizarre, somehow, mountains happening that suddenly below the plane, until the vast plain under the plane, the unlimited extent of mud and green, was as it were heaved upward, and made cataclysmically into that area of calamity which has always cut India from the north.

The plane breathing. One felt with. Some difficulty. Then the greenness on the other side.

Like the Canada greenness, to this moment clean and complete across my eyes, whole, still, as in coming back down the St. Lawrence in '57, feeling the neck of the river, then the narrowing neck, after a number of days in the indefiniteness of a gray ocean. Then, not having known they existed, sighting towns of red-painted farmhouses and little spired churches, and seeing children running there, and feeling, really, that such seclusion was mythical. And lying down on the deck and feeling my head like some stone in my hands and trying to lift it and not being able to. Not being able to.

For who was, in fact, left in peace? I could look from those gardens of rock back, and I suppose you could have too, and on every side, in what you named a life, there would have been cliffs and impossibilities and the uncared teeth of events. And like us all, surely, you would have felt with what speed all that dragged away like skins of old ideas.

Felt what was *contra mundum*, as I felt in Utsonomiya, at tea, in those massive Buddhist graveyards, felt even in the immediate afterpressure of the memory of men's crowded and suffering natures which, in Taipei, were bewilderingly dense and unrelieved. 'The festival for the local Buddhist saint,' as Thomas had put it while we rode out in the pedicab. The absolute, undestined crawl of simple people whose yielding to it could only be final, but who could never not have done so, not have yielded.

When we went in to the pissfilled movie theater. Past the cell-like billiard balls. The stripshow. Past the houses where the people of almost no income had prepared feasts for the gods. And sat, like blacks in Chicago, sweating in their doorways, pouring into their eyes the night.

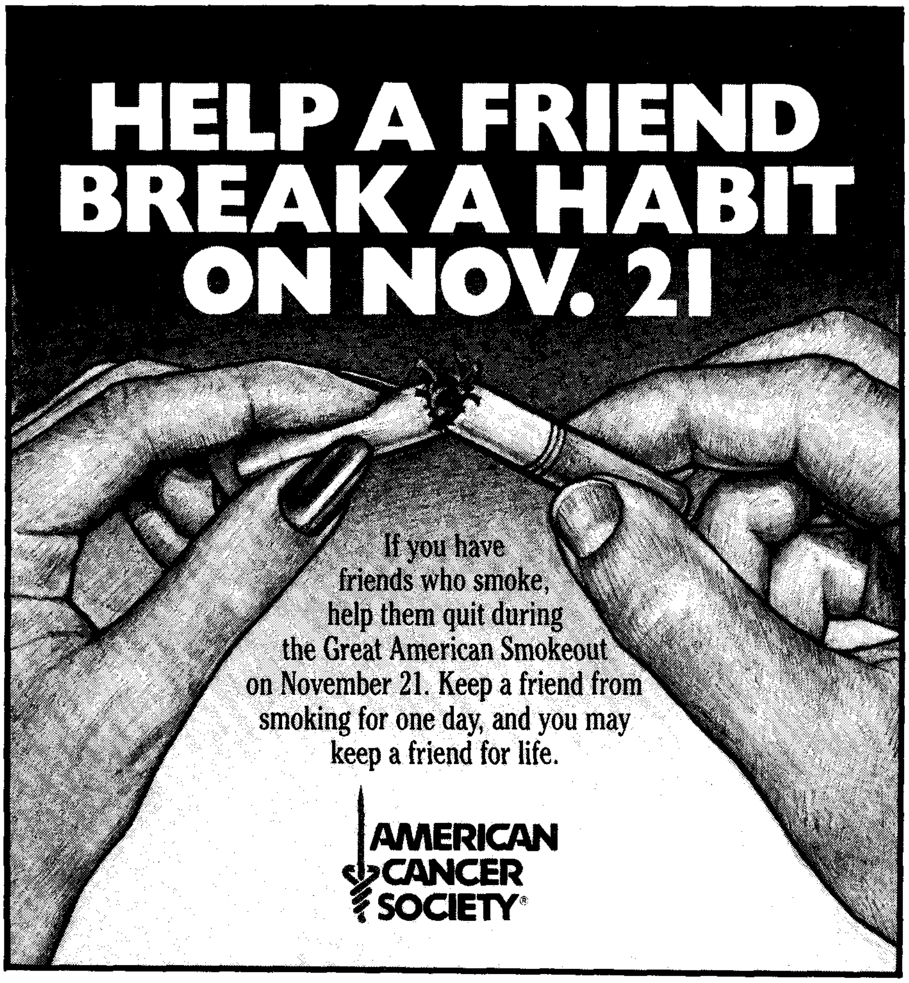
Which in Delhi too had been most brutal, pullulant. Paralyzed forms. The night. When I woke on the balcony, drowned, in my cot, by monsoon, and looked to find the vacant lot, behind the YMCA, crowded with sleeping bodies—not there at dusk—drenched-rot sleeping Aryan bodies. ☐

A reminder to our readers:

Effective December 1, 1985, the cover price of The North American Review will rise to $3.00, and the subscription price will become:

$11 per year in the United States;
$12 per year in Canada and Latin America;
$14 per year elsewhere.

While we're not pleased to be making this announcement, the sad fact remains that since the last increase (four years ago) our costs have risen at the rate of about six per cent each year, while our operating budget has remained constant. We will, of course, accept multi-year subscriptions at the present rate until December 1st.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Working Theories of New Fiction

MARCEL CORNIŞ-POP

> *"It's only a novel don't forget."*
> *"I understand that very well, but don't say only.*
> *It's been three years of our lives."*
> —Ronald Sukenick, *Up* (1968)

When, as in his recent collection of essays *In Form. Digressions on the Act of Fiction* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press, 1985) Ronald Sukenick makes it the "duty of interpretation to avoid hierophantic complications and to render itself unnecessary as it extends our experience of the poem" (p.26), he is not—one earnestly hopes—wishing criticism out of existence, but rather redefining it as part of the writer's *textual experience*. What Sukenick has in mind here is a kind of "writing on writing" and thinking "in form" which completes the writer's "ongoing conversation with himself that may be overheard in a poem, a story, an essay or an interview. One can start at any point on the periphery and arrive at the center" (p. xi). Still, we should expect this self-conscious, critical voice to mark itself out in the conversational rumor and advance beyond the limited exercise of "metafiction." It is true that Sukenick's early narratives contributed their share to that trendy species that "assimilates all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself" (according to Robert Scholes's classic definition of "Metafiction," *Iowa Review*, I,4, Fall 1970); but the very fact that he now felt the need to bring together his "theoretical" pronouncements and "digressions" (published in magazines over the years) proves that contemporary fiction has been seeking (and finding) a working theory *outside* its narrative world.

A similar reason seems to inform other books of critical essays published by well-known "fictionists" of late: John Barth's *The Friday Book. Essays and Other Nonfiction* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1984), Gilbert Sorrentino's *Something Said. Essays* (San Francisco: North Point, 1984) or William H. Gass's *Habitations of the Word. Essays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985). Together they outline, in a kind of explicit intertextual dialogue (with reciprocal citations and countercomments) a moment of critical retrospective, bringing the process of "progressive qualification" (that has already started at least as early as Barthelme's 1964 "After Joyce" essay) to some form of completion.

Completion leading to a standstill, patterning the new (often confessedly avant-gardist) experiment into a *formula*? The risk is there, and the four authors in discussion try to ward it off by various means. "In a world that pushes constantly in the direction of the impersonal and systematic"—Sukenick writes—"we need fiction (and criticism) that is subversively personal and unsystematic, . . . unruly, unpredictable, threatening to humanists with its humaneness" (p. 33). With the very notions of "underground," "avant-garde," "experiment" now slipping away, "pasteurized and homogenized" by the publishing industry, what is needed is some new form of *artistic resistance*, a new poetics of composition. This is Sukenick's theme in his introductory essay, "Art and the Underground," or in his January 27th *New York Times Book Review* article, "Up from the Garret: Success Then and Now." The message is hopeful: "There is an underground about to make its presence felt" in such forms as the new innovative fiction or the deformalized, digressive critical thinking. Sukenick traces their roots back to an American tradition of "resistance," extending from Emerson to Wallace Stevens, Henry Miller and Charles Olson. The fateful disregard of this tradition is responsible for creating that "schizoid split" in contemporary culture between conventional art and avant-garde, between art and life, pop-cultism and experimentalism, pattern and process. A return to Emerson means a return to improvisation and freedom of thought, to literary discourse as "composition."

William H. Gass uses the model of Emerson (in his opening piece, "Emerson and the Essay") in similar ways to define a type of critical meditation, specifically American, that shifts its boundaries, encircles continuously its subject, follows the sinuous processes of writing and readjustment of perspective. Gass's introductory essay is also a structural reënactment, a *mise en scène* of this theory of essayism, just as Sukenick's digressions "in form" (as opposed to comments *on* form) are a practical exemplification of this type of critical thinking in the making. Both essayists love paradoxes, tentative statements, detours (even "wrong-headed" ones—as Sukenick defines some of the digressions), they try to engage the flux of the mind with the difference that Sukenick, more than Gass (or Barth) avoids self-consciously the end-products of conceptualization. He appears to be "too busy with thinking to have time for . . . what is traditionally known as 'thought.' Thought is the province of the university, which is totally dedicated to playback, while outside the academy walls, we're improvising on the basis of the ongoing, the arbitrary, the unforeseeable, the demands of our constant invention." (p. 85)

The underlying assumption here is that the writer's comments have to be clearly dissociated from both the interpretive/analytical criticism—described as often shallow, misdirected, lacking authority—and from literary theory (of a more systematic kind). "Perhaps one of the best things that can be said for theory is that it's a good way to get rid of theory . . ."; or again: "Theory is a sign of ignorance. It becomes important when we are no longer sure what we are doing." But, despite such aphoristic exercises, Sukenick is very familiar with methods on both sides of the "academy walls" and he does not hesitate to use to his advantage such analytical playback or the generalizations (conceptual or heuristic) of the "present impresarios of ideas" (in Gass's ironic phrase): Barthes, Derrida, Ricardou, Alain Robbe-Grillet, etc. His successive essays piece together a pretty consistent working concept of fiction that is allowed to carry more weight than a simple "rule-of-thumb theory."

Likewise, Barth, Sorrentino and Gass, while casting aside the label of "critic" and scorning those that still earn a living by it, often rely on interpretation, submitting their art of digression to the drudgery of applied criticism and even reviewing (in Sorrentino's case). Their writings on writings are more than just a weekend venture across the bay into "some other sort of sentence making, preferably nonfiction" (to use Barth's metaphor for his *Friday Book*). They have crossed over the border between fiction and criticism already pre-armed with concepts and methods from the blemished critical theory: these they have further reinforced with suggestions from the philosophy of language (Gass), or of composition (Sukenick), from a literary history in the making (Sorrentino) or a personal mythopoiesis (Barth). Their approach, improvisational and eclectic, but certainly rich in ideas, is best suited perhaps for taking account of the quicksand scene of contemporary fiction. As Jerome Klinkowitz (the editor of the Modern Critiques/Crosscurrents in its third series, and of Sukenick's book of essays) writes in a prefacing note: "critiquing contemporary culture often means that the writer must be a historian, philosopher, sociologist, and bibliographer as well as literary critic, for in many cases these essential preliminary tasks are yet undone" (p. vii).

In many ways Jerome Klinkowitz's own critical work is exemplary from this point of view: as an ongoing gloss on contemporary fiction, expanding in several directions a central core of analytical hypotheses, it has by now encompassed an "histoire vive" of recent fiction (*Literary Disruptions*) with its attending models for critical approaches (*Literary Subversions*), a cultural survey (*The American 1960s*), a poetics (the recent *Self-Apparent Word. Fiction as Language/Language as Fiction*) and even a "Life of Fiction," representing the very process of critical elaboration in a constant dialogue (collage) of texts. Furthermore, Klinkowitz's own brand of processual criticism comes close to Sukenick's notion of "formal thinking" as an *alternative* to traditional interpretation, "straddl[ing] both academic and nonacademic realms," cutting across critical dichotomies. "Formal thinking" (that is "thinking about art based on the way it is composed rather than on the way it is interpreted"—p. xix) is the province of the writer. As such it should take precedence over analytical (professional) criticism, become its subject together with the rest of that author's work. Sukenick's alternative modalities remind one of Harold Bloom's distinction between a "theory of poetry" understood as "the concept of the nature and function of the poet and poetry," and "poetics which has to do with the techniques of poetical composition" (see, for example, Bloom's "The Breaking of Form" in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, New York: Seabury, 1979, pp. 1-37). Bloom and Sukenick stand apart in their choice of the two extremes, but they meet in their uncharacteristic definition of them: Bloom's "theory of poetry" resembling more and more a narrative-metaphoric scenario, Sukenick's "poetics" being freed from canonical and formal prescriptions and returned to its "experiential" dynamism.

Sukenick translates his ideal of "a thinking about art based upon the way it is composed rather than how it is interpreted" in terms of a *generative theory* of fiction. In simpler terms this means that the literary text is generated by the activity of composition, in the absence of any *a priori* idea of form and in disregard of any concept of imitation/representation. The immediate models for this generative, antimimetic approach (the same ones discussed by Sorrentino in his early *Kulchur* reviews) are action painting, Williams, Frank O'Hara or Olson's idea of composition as an "open field," as "a nexus of various kinds of energy, image, and experience" (Sukenick, 11). Sukenick's overall method, opposed polemically to the parody-of-exhausted-forms approach (as represented by Barth) aims "to push out to the edge of culture and of form and work always with open forms, which can in the language of some of the painters allow more reality into the work. I'm always working with collage and tape recorders, or the unpremeditated. I like forms which do not allow me to know what's going to happen next, even formally." (p. 135—this comes from a 1979 interview conducted by Charlotte Meyer). The other techniques in Sukenick's bag of tricks: improvisation (a kind of "mental jazz"), narrative flow and blockage, collage and cutting, metamorphosis (of names, identities, places, images). Such methods, treating art as *process* and form as an emanation of experience have little to do with the "cul de sac" formalism of early metafiction. Barth's narrative and certainly his recent *Friday Book* reveal an obsession with patterns, frames, models, numbers, symmetries. Barth has stayed basically a structuralist with a seriocomic belief in the "Chimera" of the Golden Ratio. Sukenick, on the other hand, shows interest in artificial forms and arbitrary sequences (of numbers, narrative situations) to the extent he can take advantage of their (culturally) "empty space," or can transgress their meaningless frames. "Through puns or through arbitrary devices," he explains in another interview, "through the imposition of odd schemes, non sequiturs, even through improvisation" one can crack the protective shell of language and release its hidden energies (p. 111).

Such ideas (illustrated in fact with the work of Raymond Roussel) recall the best of the avant-gardist traditions. Sukenick's compositional theory (and often his practice) aim at a radical readjustment of fiction to "reality," at a break through the line dividing "art" from "life" (this also an avant-gardist goal). For Gass the novel is still basically a metaphoric art, in a figural/tropic relation with its world that is often confined within the inescapable boundaries of language. For Barth the novelist remains a self-conscious liar and manufacturer of "universes," manipulating the artifices of story and language to increase their power of seduction. For Sukenick, on the other hand, fiction is a "beneficial form of counterfeit," one in fact that strives to escape its own condition. "Its truth is poetic: a statement of a particular rapport with reality sufficiently persuasive that we may for a time share it." (p. 31) Depending upon its persuasive authority, fiction can become an important experiential medium, "no longer an imitation of life, but rather . . . an illuminating addition to its ongoing flow," "simultaneously part of life and about it."

One might argue that the "flow of life" in question is often reduced to the activities of a writer trying "to write a novel by recording whatever happens to [his group of friends] so they're all characters in his novel including himself" (*98.6*, p. 68). Such an approach, pursued by "Ron Sukenick" (as fictional alter ego) in *98.6*, can seldom go beyond a classic formula of modernism (Gide-Huxley) and its later offspring, the "anti-novel." Sukenick successfully avoids many of the pitfalls of the writer-writing-a-novel-about-a-writer-writing-a-novel-that-never-takes-shape formula. Besides the various aborted, mock-novels and stories that his books contain and review critically (as in *Out*, 1973) there is always a framing outer story, a novel that *does take place* eventually, rescuing its author (real Ronald Sukenick) from his many inside fictional avatars experimenting with failure. Especially *98.6* (1975) illustrates the cohesive force of *writing*, yoking together mock-autobiography, non-fictional material, newspaper clippings, history and symbolic generalizations according to what "Cloud" (another authorial alter ego) calls the "law of mosaics": "a way of dealing with parts in the absence of wholes," of completing a narrative through the sheer energy of composition.

Another criticism usually levelled at experimental fiction, especially of the "formalistic" kind (see, for example, Charles Newman's recent *The Post-Modern Aura. The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation*, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1985) involves its "superficiality" resulting from an overinsistence on the *opacity* of reality and/or of language. There is a very clear *anti-interpretive* and *anti-transcendental* orientation in the essays of Sukenick and Sorrentino, for example. Sorrentino is interested in the manifestations of narrative discourse on a primary, nonsymbolical level (as in Williams's prose); he opposes to the gaudy metaphorism of the Updike-*New Yorker* school or the naïve handling of novelistic "signals" in realistic fiction, the ideal of a "signalless American novel." Though not as explicit in the rejection of the "interpretive fallacy" as Sorrentino, Gass also emphasizes the essential ambiguity of fictional language, both richly referential and void, a "circle" and a "blank" (see his "Representation and the War for Reality" essay in the latest book). Sukenick cites Gass and Sorrentino for their effort to outline an anti-mimetic, generative theory of art, but finds that they are still "encumbered . . . by undigested leftovers from other theories." Thus Gass discusses fiction as a *model* of the world; "but the idea of the model reintroduces the schizoid split between art and reality. This is basically a subtler kind of imitation theory in which the continuity between art and experience is broken because art is seen as a mode essentially different from experience." Sorrentino, on the other hand, by wanting art to mirror the *processes* of the real (instead of reality directly) still illustrates a "variant of imitation, and in fact it could be argued that this version is probably what Aristotle had in mind to begin with . . ." ("Thirteen Digressions," 1973—pp. 16-33 of *In Form*). Sukenick's own more radical version of anti-Aristotelianism is most evident in "The New Tradition" article-manifesto (1972), in the presentation of the "Bossa Nova style" of "no plot, no story, no character, no chronological sequence, no verisimilitude, no imitation, no allegory, no symbolism, no subject matter, no 'meaning' . . . The Bossa Nova is nonrepresentational—it represents itself. Its main qualities are abstraction, improvisation, and opacity." (p. 211) This *opacity*, he theorizes in the conclusion, "should direct our attention to the surface of a work, and such techniques as graphics and typographical variation, calling the reader's attention to the technological reality of the book," to "the truth of the page" (p. 212).

Still, Sukenick's fictions have gradually gone beyond the *surface* mechanics of writing. The spatial structures, useful to him at the beginning in breaking up the illusionistic flow of the story, have been more recently returned to motion, dissolved in the textual process that unfolds its own "story" again in time. "The petty iconography of the quotidian" or the early sallies into a spectacular but superficial "Erotic Autobiography" have (especially in *98.6*, but also in *Long Talking Bad Condition Blues*, 1979) become part of a larger movement of cultural exploration and of (in Sukenick's own words) "invention and even prophecy."

I do not think that another of Charles Newman's critical points (the "phony dualism between Formalism and Realism" in postmodern fiction) retains much substance when confronted with the theories (and fiction) of Sukenick, Sorrentino and several others. Sorrentino's reviews of Williams, Hubert Selby, W. Gaddis, etc., discover a new, essential "realism" in American fiction, one that explores the "prose of surfaces" beyond any conventions of fictional representation. Sukenick, in turn, relates his insistent *anti-illusionistic* approach to fiction with a new understanding or *referentiality* that takes issue with Gass's well-known metaphor of nonmimetic art: the statue with pointed finger, surrounded by empty space. "When we say that creative language is nonreferential," Sukenick argues, "I take it we mean that it doesn't refer to other language, other concepts—it points toward the mute world beyond language, beyond history, and then it falls silent. Art is an escape from language and abstraction— . . . into our birthright in the world beyond language from which language above all separates us, and which, therefore, it has the power to restore" ("Fiction in the Seventies: Ten Digressions on Ten Digressions," 1977—p. 39 of *In Form*). From this point of view Sukenick might indeed be described as a "realist": he "finds reality not by projecting subjective ideals, but by 'discovering significant relations' with what is really out there" (Jerome Klinkowitz, *Literary Disruptions*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2nd ed., 1980, p. 128). To Christine Brooke-Rose, furthermore, "Sukenick seems almost neo-realist in contrast [to Ishmael Reed], but again in such a stylised way that the effect can be unreal" (*A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 380). Whatever the accompanying

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effects, much recent fiction blurs in similar ways the incriminated distinction between "formalism" and "realism." But its emerging "realistic" poetics of composition is not of a formulaic or moralistic kind, as represented (according to Sorrentino) by John Gardner and "the puppeteer school of novelists"; it is rather that "experimental realism" that Klinkowitz tries to define when speaking of Robley Wilson's fiction. Its major task is that of undercutting the "fraudulent" versions of reality imposed by the encroaching texts of official culture, and reconnecting us with the reality behind "reality."

A third and more real problem underlies this very program of immersion in/recreation of experience in art. "The art of fiction and poetry lies precisely in opening that [self-contained system of language] up to experience beyond language," Sukenick asserts; then immediately adds: but "how can art open itself maximally to experience without destroying its integrity as artifact?" (p. 11). The envisioned solution would be that of a cyclic movement of art beyond its own frames and baggage of cultural traditions; art "continually kill[ing] itself—but it always has to make sure it's art that does the killing" (p. 43). Still, when it comes to finding methods for breaking through the "frames" of language and culture, the results may be rather controversial. This Sukenick himself has realized in his various attempts to take "sonic snapshots" ("imprints") of reality with the tape recorder. Such experiments as those carried out in *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories*, (1969), already revealed the subtle ways in which the "transcript" is manipulated, footnoted, fictionalized, returned to the essential "artifice" and "tautology" of all art.

Thus the process of readjustment of art to experience, that pursuit of a "favorable rapport with reality sufficiently convincing that disbelief may be suspended" (discovered by Sukenick already in his dissertation and book on Wallace Stevens) is characterized by an essential *circularity*. Even metaphor and symbol may become "impermanently valid instruments," while from the flux of concrete experience "a fable, a gloss, begin to develop, abstractions appear" (*The Death of the Novel*, p. 154). This circularity involves a basic paradox, a fourth problem—perhaps the most difficult to settle by Sukenick's "working theory": how does one reconcile the immediacy of experience with the technological artifice of art, improvisation with abstraction, an aspiration towards a transparent language of abstract signs with the "self-apparency" of poetic language? In several of his digressions Sukenick rejoices at the effects of contemporary technology on art: "I see a tendency for the media to become increasingly abstract so that they become more direct extensions of thinking . . . Written language may have less and less to do with speech and more and more to do with the rhythms of the mind itself" (p. 89). This attitude, at once opposed to Gass's "Habitations of the Word" and "Soul Inside the Sentence" doctrine (with its stress on the primacy of the spoken word as the "innermost language" of the self), places too much faith in the superiority of a technologically created, abstract language for conveying information. For one thing, art cannot be reduced to information or an algebra of signs. Sukenick himself concedes elsewhere that "Obviously, there is no progress in art . . . The avant-garde is a convenient propaganda device, but when it wins the war everything is avant-garde which leaves us just where we were before" (p. 201). On the whole, Sukenick's "revisionistic Muse" is more successful in avoiding blatant statements of the theme of "progress" in art than, say, Barth's in "The Literature of Exhaustion" essay: "it is dismaying to see so many of our writers following Dostoevsky or Tolstoy or Balzac, when the question seems to me to be how to succeed not even Joyce and Kafka, but those who *succeeded* Joyce and Kafka and are now in the evenings of their own careers." (*The Friday Book*, p. 67). Barth himself, in a footnote to this controversial passage, amends his naïve vision of linear progress in art; and in other essays he returns past Borges or Beckett to his heroic model of the "belated" storyteller: Scheherazade. Sukenick, likewise, finds alternative models for innovative fiction in the works of Rabelais, Sterne, Emerson, Shklovsky, Henry Miller or Wallace Stevens; while William H. Gass rediscovers the baroque art of Ford Madox Ford. Sukenick's generative theory of composition has ultimately little to do with Chomsky or Derrida, placing a greater stress on the experiences of the writer and reader than on the self-generating energies of the text (though the latter are not neglected). Finally, his "working theory" of composition is, like the related theories of the other authors discussed here, a direct emanation of his own fiction, a kind of ongoing "report" on a passionate "struggle with the angel of form" and a necessary gesture of artistic resistance against the "Disneyland" approach of the dominant, mass-marketed fiction. □

Mixed Short Fictions

CAROLYN HARDESTY

Off in Zimbabwe, by Ron Kessler.
To Leningrad in Winter, by Steven Schwartz.
Filthy the Man, by Gerald Flaherty.
University of Missouri. $7.95 each
Once Upon a Death, by R. Michael Benson. Lynx House. $7.
(Black River Fiction Series)

Ernest Becker in *The Denial of Death* says we all get through the day with big lies to resolve tensions and provide the necessary rationalizations. Perhaps writers make their living by these very words. If there are common trends among the collections here, it is a frequent avoidance of honesty through creative methods of deceit and distraction. Whether it's narcissism or disposing of dead animals or turning a kidnap-murder back into fiction, these writers find ways of swooping by their prey. Sometimes it's done with the playfulness of a dolphin and other times it's done with the terrorism of a shark.

Many of the fifteen stories in Rod Kessler's *Off in Zimbabwe* illustrate the effect of the title: they distract. The only connection to Africa in this book is a newspaper's story about the fighting between Nkomo and Mugabe and its power to distract young Frank from the sensitization exercise his wife wants to perform. "Our whole goddamn marriage is at stake, and you're off in Africa! Who cares about Africa!"

Love, careers, marriages or living arrangements slip elsewhere because of obsessions—Izod alligators plague a Vietnam veteran who wants to murder the wearers; a narrator is preoccupied with regularity or the lack of it in both himself and in "his wife's dog"; imprecise grammar found in a letter from a lover's mother undoes a romance; and diary-keeping with carefully noted times since the last cigarette, short-term and cumulative miles run, and lists of tasks planned or accomplished replace the life they recount. Kessler pulls at our attention in these stories the way a cat uses your leg for a scratching post in the middle of "60 Minutes."

In other stories he uses a beginning/middle/end structure with characters who, like the rest of us, operate in a context of familiar cultural surroundings. Kessler, however, has the ability to shrink the context just enough to make it ill-fitting, to remind us to be alert and to make us wish we could consult with the characters. Since we can't, we're left as voyeurs in a way, and aware of our inability to help.

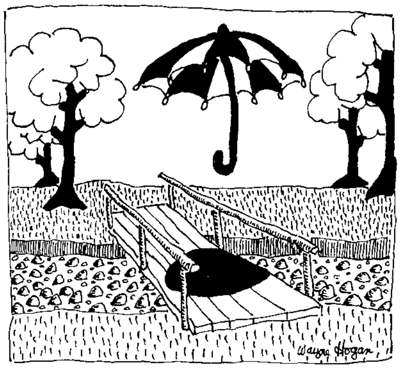
While dogs, cats or rats are often dead or dying in these stories, "Benny and I" is the only story which deals with intentional killing. Successfully told from a child's viewpoint, Benny and the narrator, both fatherless sons, go hunting. They end up shooting a cat because it's the only animal they can get into the gunsight. Assuming its status as legal prey because it is after all in the wilderness, the guileless boys take it home, proudly skin it, and then to complete their manhood experience split the pelt in half. The discriminating sensibility we have for domestic pets versus animals we eat is spotlighted. Through Kessler's handling, we may clutch at the idea, "How could they?" but we're then forced to breathe deeply and think "Why shouldn't they?"

The piece closest to an experimental form is called "Dos Serpientes" and is an engaging tale about an affair the narrator had with a co-worker's wife. The narrator tells the story as an illustration for an academic piece he's doing on the responsibility of artists, particularly novelists. And he's writing at the kitchen table in his Southwest home while the woman he lives with constantly interrupts to keep him on track. The narrator's paper is indistinguishable from the narrative about his life as a novelist in the town for which the story is named, and to the reader's delight, the woman easily slips in her acerbic comments.

In addition to the often comic layering of conversational language with academese appropriate to scholarly works, the tale is neatly coiled in snakes—real, imagistic, and phallic.

Kessler's writing is a pleasure to read—rhythmical, and firmly balanced with content. His humor is often delivered to achieve the effect of having overheard a wise crack on the elevator:

"Beth's dog is old and worn. He smells like a man given to thin cigars."



"They were probably outside sitting around the pool, Skip and Sarah, catching some sun and giving their busy genitals an airing."

"Victoria and her housemates were, it turned out, vegetarian. Dinner was something done to beans."

The least successful (or perhaps just the least interesting) story is "The Death of Rodney Snee." From a child's point of view (each of these collections makes use of this apparently irresistible format at least once) this recollection of characters is slightly hysterical and predictable. But on the whole *Off in Zimbabwe* is easy to recommend; not surprisingly, it was the 1985 winner of the sixth annual Associated Writing Programs Award Series in Short Fiction.

Some of the stories in *Once Upon a Death*, by R. Michael Benson make you think you're reading a foreign language and only by dumb luck does it happen to be English. Benson writes convincingly from the voices of inner-city poor black children, an aging Jewish man, and middle-class white men.

The lead story, "On Dying" begins, "It's a bad day for niggers in the classroom. We don't really give a good rat's ass where the hell the Great Salt Lake is, so Purvis sticks it just outside of New Rochelle. And Densil think that 6 × 8 is the height of the power forward for the New York Knickerbockers, which is why they ain't worth shit either . . ." The next paragraph reveals that it's time for a three minute rest and then cookies and milk.

In this first-person story, the narrator, Lester, selects to drop dead occasionally because in fact life with a bitch of a stepmother and bossy stepsister is more than he can tolerate. With tidal certainty, Benson's prose takes us through Lester's scheme to his desired conclusion (father apparently leaves wife and alcoholic life behind) without sentimentality or sleights of hand.

The title story is not as grim as the woodcut which graces the cover, but it is about death at every turn. The narrator, Harland, works in a funeral parlor and smells like the chemicals of death. His wife who smells of Alberto VO^5 often threatens to leave him, but spends most of her time tending their son, a hemophiliac, whose cloistered life smells of Vicks Vapo-Rub, and whose existence is so foreign to Harland that he generally refers to him as "it." This blatant distancing is reinforced in a description like: "In the dim light, he's got fine white hair, with blue veins showing underneath in the scalp. Sometimes, when he bleeds, you can see it all spreading out and swishing underneath the skin like a long wasted river."

Harland sees hope in his promotion to resting room host—no more stench—but it's not enough to save the marriage. And as a final and reckless act, he frees his son from his room one snowy night to play catch.

Benson writes with so much denseness that the characters and their situations, no matter how alien, forcefully embrace readers. This stylized muscularity doesn't quite work in "Negative Stimulus," a tale of two

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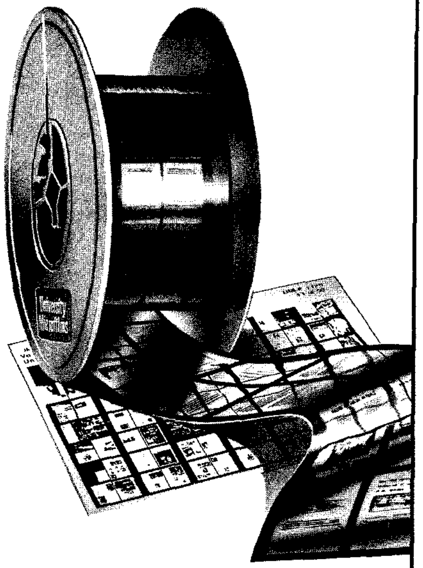

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brothers, one of whom has been mute since their mother committed suicide. The sons are tended by Darlia from Biloxi while their father is a newscaster for the Chicago CBS affiliate.

The dialogue which brings Lester to us (and, in later stories, Tyrell and the seventh graders in "Ti' Whistle") doesn't make sense for this story. Occasional imitation of Darlia's idiolect would be appropriate but ten-year-old Lloyd constantly talks and narrates like this: "Which Daddy lets me do, because he don't know otherwise, him talking so busy on that telephone about leaving out the goddamn cities." This prose simply doesn't stand up as the syntax of a white lad from River Forest, Illinois whose father is a professional public speaker. That flaw aside, the subculture within the school, with Darlia, with youthful peers including a retarded boy, is conveyed with the same textural richness found in the other stories.

Benson's writing, including his dialogue, is paced to give readers a feeling of wading through without getting mired. His ability to evoke characters and connections is admirable.

Steven Schwartz's collection, *To Leningrad in Winter*, begins and ends with terrific stories. More about the middle later. The opening tale, "Monkey Business," is hilarious and a great deal more. Yes, the narrator's wife is running around, but he's also a cartoonist who has fun with animals, particularly monkeys. He's sad that monkey humor is so clichéd that the cliché isn't even funny. And he's especially sad when he can no longer deny his wife's philanderings: "The effect of deceit, Carl decides with mild relief, appears to be mostly physical. Mental anguish has always terrified him because of its unlimited possibilities. The body, however, knows when it is being hurt and recognizes at exactly what point relief is demanded. The mind is never so precise. It has to make certain the pain really exists. The mind is slow—very, very slow—to verify its catches."

The title story, winner of an O. Henry Prize, is an even-handed presentation of the way we reluctantly obligate ourselves to each other. Peter Blum is Jewish but doesn't make much of it. Nevertheless, he's pressured into joining a run which will be held at the same time all over the world in support of the refuseniks. The irresistible pressure comes from the small town's rabbi, whose fears are up and whose alarms are at the ready because of anti-semitic activities which have victimized him. Near the end of the race, when Blum and the rabbi's son are the only ones running, it becomes clear that the son has done the racist vandalism. "'Nobody cared! Nobody was doing anything!' . . . the boy fell to his knees, cringing from a hand that struck his face hard, making his head ring against the fence post and blood spurt instantly from his mouth." And Peter, who has lived his life with such caution—"For five years he'd been lucky and careful enough not to even have a cavity."—hoists the boy onto his back "If he slipped on a patch of ice now, he'd break both their necks. . . . He had fifteen minutes, a mile and a half to go. He had 320 million more breaths if he lived until eighty. . . . He could use most of his share and still hope for a decent life with whatever was going to be left."

The child's-viewpoint story in this collection illuminates the link in a young man's mind between physical power and adulthood. For most of the story Gordon bemoans his lack of pubic hair while resisting a confrontation of hand to hand combat with a challenger. The fight happens after a game of slow-motion—something between rugby and square dancing (and the story's title)—when Gordon realizes that "he'd have to fight harder to lose than to win." Pleasure in reading the story is tinged by the author intruding where he's not needed.

The collection has at least one weak link in "A Program for Writers," an opening reception for new members of a university writing program which seems too full of the predictable characters. But perhaps the most disappointing story is "In Alaska," where the author uses a female narrative voice. (In these four books, this is the only sexual masquerade.) In letters to a friend, the woman complains and explains her following Robert and the continuing chase after him, often with excessive cuteness or archness. The rare dialogue brings to life something similar: clever female plunged into wilderness. (Didn't Jane Fonda take care of this in "The Electric Horseman"?) She of course has to learn how to use a gun because of the bears, and then has to actually use one when her hero has an epileptic seizure. We are spared her needing to kill the bear.

Despite the weaknesses in Schwartz's collection, the book offers enjoyable reading and occasional brilliance of humor or evocation of character. I look forward to his next collection.

Gerald Flaherty's *Filthy the Man* is a demanding book. The lead story introduces seven characters in the first paragraph and then takes them through a ritual of 'teen maleness—"cases of Rheingold, more popcorn, and a carton of Luckys." The beer is processed and returned to the empty bottles during an evening of arm wrestling and other horseplay. The following three stories deal with these same characters in various configurations and ages, so eventually a context and tags are created in the reader's mind.

The four stories unconnected to these characters are discrete and satisfying for that. "The Terrible Speed of Mercy" presents a ball star who rose to a major league at 20, had a fit and is in a catatonic state. Out of the institution for the weekend, he is taken by his father to a bar where the son, still handsome, is surrounded by young women who fondle him and coo at him. The father relishes the attention, too, and in the men's room, selects an aftershave from a coin dispenser and unbuttons his shirt one space. The trip down memory lane ends abruptly when the son, filled with soft drinks, profusely wets himself and the floor.

Other stories have mixed narrative voices—an aging architect in a quality nursing home, an unemployed academic with a wound in his foot who returns futilely to his ex-wife, and—in perhaps the star of the book, "Something to Talk Like a Family About"—an aging son, who lives with his 76-year-old mother and her fairly recent husband, bickers and chips away at them, grasping hard to hold onto youthful roles.

Flaherty is at times extremely deft and subtle in presenting these characters and their motives. He also has an obvious insight for delivering the tough life of the Boston Mission district. But what he has to tell would be more welcome if he leaned away from the distractingly chaotic format which makes you feel like you've arrived at a party late, and the question of whether or not to stay is more pressing than either who the guests are or what's on the buffet table. □

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Jazz for Jazz Lovers

ROBERTA METZ SWANN

Rhythm-a-ning: Jazz Tradition and Innovation in the 80's by Gary Giddins. Oxford. $17.95

Gary Giddins is a major jazz critic, so I expected *Rhythm-a-ning* to be good. What buoyed me most was his moral intelligence, his pure passion and extraordinary personal style. Mr. Giddins is a caring and careful critic. Nothing he writes is random or preachy. Within each piece, there is a "pause," gifting the reader with a personal relationship to the thing written. On one hand, this collection *swings*, which is to say it affects both mind and body, making you take your feet off the desk. On the other hand, these reviews are relaxing. Reading, you know almost instantly you're in good hands. While the collection contains over 60 individual pieces, it plays like a well-rehearsed, fluid solo. It's clear Giddins is a fan of what he does. His goal: to make jazz flourish and gain the same respect and stature afforded to symphonic music. And why not?

To reply to myself, I quote from Mr. Giddins' last paragraph to his introduction:

> Yet, despite what amounts to a media blackout, jazz somehow manages to replenish its audience and its musicians with every generation. Jazz festivals proliferate, at least in Europe, and so do independent labels and reissue series. Mail-order companies, from the Smithsonian Collection to Time/Life, have found a bonanza in jazz. The music may be in exile, but it isn't fading away. I intend to help spread the news of the increasing accessibility of swing and melody and beauty in the jazz of the '80s, but I'm fully aware that the bounding line between jazz and the mainstream of American life is a tradition unto itself.

Rhythm-a-ning is an attempt to educate. It has verbal wit and vision and, while deadly serious, it is also infinitely entertaining. The collection is filled with anecdotes, which when repeated will make people remember you at parties. There are also random facts. I now know that there are nearly 3000 versions of "Body and Soul," which is the most recorded American pop song; that no one translated more pop into jazz than Armstrong; that Slim Gaillard could fashion an entire scat sonata around his favorite word, *avocado;* that Woody Herman bought Humphrey Bogart's house in 1946 and still lives there; that Herman was invited to play "Ebony Concerto," written by Stravinsky especially for him, at the Stravinsky centennial at La Scala, and that the trombone is the oldest instrument in the orchestra after percussion, and hasn't changed in 500 years. Switching tempo, the saddest *fact* is that despite so many jazz composers with vivid identities, the Pulitzer Prize has never been given to any of them. And despite the renaissance in jazz, it remains "a private cultural zone."

If there's one sensation I've absorbed from Giddins, it's that "insatiability" makes the man make the music. Each performance, even of classics, makes it new. From *Riding on a Blue Note,* Giddins first book, I hear Gillespie saying: You'd think the trumpet gets easier, but it doesn't. The more you know, the more you know what you can't do.

Giddins talks for all of us musically-conscious citizens who squirm over the fact that record companies rally around the taste of 14-year-olds. "Few educated Americans can name even five jazz musicians under the age of 40," states Giddins. And why is everyone listening to Linda Ronstadt's "What's New?" when they can be listening to the real thing? I suppose it's because Noel Coward was right when he said, "It's extraordinary how potent cheap music is." Maybe our musical taste needs to be shaped and pumped. I for one am optimistic, because Giddins is the critical equivalent of a Nautilus machine. Still, at this writing the jazz station I'm tuned to is playing a mix of a Martin Luther King speech behind a funk beat!

Rhythm-a-ning contains multitudes: there are pieces on pop, blues, rock-and-roll, European jazz, Thelonious Monk (who coined the term "Rhythm-a-ning" as a song title), David Murray, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Wynton Marsalis, Mike Westbrook, Henry Threadgill, Pat Metheny, Anthony Davis, James Ulmer, Tony Bennett, Ronald Shannon Jackson, Roy Eldridge, Sonny Rollins, Stan Getz, Frank Sinatra, and more.

I particularly yield to Giddins' range of literary references. "Like Yeats, Lester Young found the strength to 'wither into truth.' " And beginning a treasurable chapter on Thelonius Monk, Giddins goes to Philip Roth's *The Ghost Writer*: "When Nathan Zuckerman fishes for approbation, the great Lonoff tells him he has 'the most compelling voice I've encountered in years, certainly for somebody starting out. I don't mean style. I mean voice: something that begins at around the back of the knees and reaches well above the head.' "

There is great irony in that piece because Thelonious Monk was ignored and mistreated, despite his genius and commitment—a fact that makes me appreciate and admire Mr. Giddins' stamina, high aims and fierce idealism even more. As a jazz lover with great lapses of historical knowledge, I find Giddins helps me fit the past into the present. He reacquaints and tutors my musical ear. Pragmatically, I have saved time and money at the record bins, resisting punk-pink jackets, and purchasing his researched recommendations.

To say that Giddins kicks ass is putting truth before tact. But while he is never shrill, he can't be bullied. He and we know that all art is political, that hack composers make hack music, that artistic struggle is the norm. I smile in similar experience when Mr. Giddins remembers his grandmother watching Jackie Wilson on Dick Clark's Saturday night show with the same fascination he imagined she brought to Eddie Cantor. "He was the kind of *schvartze* no Yiddishe mama could resist. But then, no aspect of American life undermined the habits of racism as much as the thirst for entertainment."

Never have I wanted more just to quote from a book. This is not a collection of bouillon cube reviews that never reconstitute, those trendy reports that suffer from the absence of anything beyond tone. There is real information here, and humor. The reader is enhanced. As critic, Giddins approaches the category of hero. His moral poise provides a perfect exhilaration. Read *Rhythm-a-ning*. Then listen to the music. □

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> "Once we made the choice to produce our plays, not recoup an investment but to recoup some corner of the universe for our understanding and enlargement, we entered into the same world as the university, the church, the library, the museum, the church, and became, like them, an instrument of civilization."
>
> *Zelda Fichandler*
> *Producing Director—Arena Stage*

Among the first literary works in English were the "cycle plays." From 1378—and probably earlier—at least 125 towns in central England put them on; those that survive come from Chester, Wakefield, and York. Celebrating the mystery of the divinity in the body of Jesus Christ, the Passion Plays came in the spring between late May and late June at the church festival of "Corpus Christi," the town corporation—the governing body—charged with their coordination. At York there were 48 playlets in the cycle, allocated to various local craft guilds, each responsible for producing its own—independently.

All this went along with the rise of the civic/commercial bourgeoisie—the middle class—which, while properly obedient to Church and King, depended on neither for lifeblood support. These were times when urban and commercial interests were growing at the expense of the landed aristocracy, and one result was a middle-class theatre, "professional" in that it was created and supported by highly motivated professional craftsmen, artisans in their own right.

Among the craft guilds were: Barkers, Plasterers, Cardmakers, Fullers, Coopers, Armorers, Glovers, Shipwrights—to name a few of many. With a fine sense of the appropriate and not a little irony, it was the Barkers who produced "The Creation and the Fall of Lucifer," the Shipwrights who did the "Building of the Ark." The Marshals (horse grooms) did "Flight into Egypt"; "The Crucifixion" was the Pinners and Painters. It seems to lend historic precedent to guild/union support of modern theatre, and, stretching it, to corporate sponsorship of Public TV.

Back then piety was bigger than self-celebration—Gothic cathedrals were unsigned, for instance. As creativity was anonymous, so the plays were anonymous, and the product of many hands. There must have been myriad revisions along the way, handed down from generation to generation, guild to guild.

And these plays were staged on Pageant Wagons that could be rolled to different parts of town. Although not pictured anywhere (unfortunately), references from the early 17th century describe them as 4-6 wheel, 2-story carts with curtained dressing room below and an acting area on top. Perhaps there was another level above that—for "heaven" and/or a space to house the machinery for a *deus ex machina.* It's possible two of them might have been put together for more complex productions.

Constructed by skilled artisans over a period of 200 years, they could have been expected to become increasingly grand in style (as there must have been increasing skill and subtlety in the dramaturgy). In the manner of their time, the Pageant Wagons were elaborate, expensive—representations of the rising power and sophistication of the middle class.

In the rigidly middle-class United States, Puritanism is a dominant force, one of its tenets being self-improvement. In 1826 the National American Lyceum—for adult education, social reform, political discussion—was established in Massachusetts. Spreading to other communities nationwide, it waxed fat for 40 years. Then, in 1873, at the Methodist Episcopal summer camp meeting, the Chautauqua Institute was established in New York state. With the proposal that secular (along with religious) instruction be part of the summer Sunday School institute, it developed into a hugely successful 8-week summer program, with courses in arts, sciences, humanities; thousands attended. And if you didn't come in person, there were home study programs; lecturers were sent to illustrate the materials from the institute.

As with the Lyceum, other communities were inspired. Possibly three hundred Chautauquas were organized and writers, explorers, musicians, political leaders were contracted for, along with a *variety of entertainment*—theatre. The experience was something of a cross between a revival meeting and a country fair with theatre in the middle. In 1912 Chautauqua was organized commercially and continued successfully until 1924. In Ashland, Oregon, home of one of my favorite regional/non-profit theatres—The Oregon Shakespearean Festival—the copy of the Elizabethan Playhouse, one of OSF'S three theatres, is built on the foundation of the old Chautauqua dome.

Then, in this country and England, vaudeville was originally a light entertainment of unrelated songs, dances, dramatic and comic sketches, jugglers and acrobats, puppeteers and various stunts—in effect a *Variety* show. Derived in America—according to some sources—from drinking and love songs with humble bar room beginnings, it came to be that vaudeville theatres were all over the country. The Palace in New York City was perhaps best known, and the period between 1880-1932 the genre's salad years. Traditional vaudeville (in which the performers were content to work the circuit within the traditions of the form) declined with the advent and facility of the first of the new 20th Century middle class entertainments: radio and motion picture.

Theatre Communications Group (TCG—founded in 1961 as national organization to provide a forum/network for non-profit professional theatre) has been surveying the regional (decentralized—anything outside Broadway) theatre scene for eleven years. In 124 cities, in 45 states (and D.C.), having put up 56,735 performances in 3434 productions, the 230 theatres talked to in '84 are the largest number surveyed in the eleven years.

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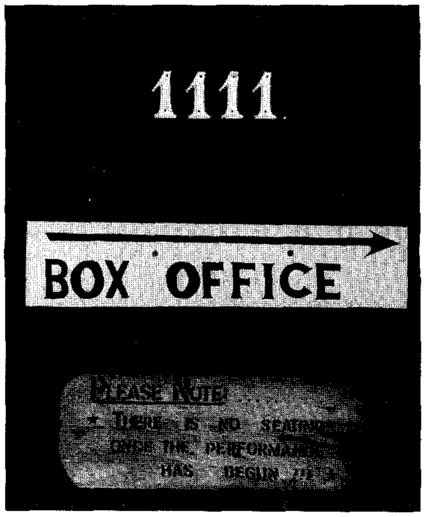
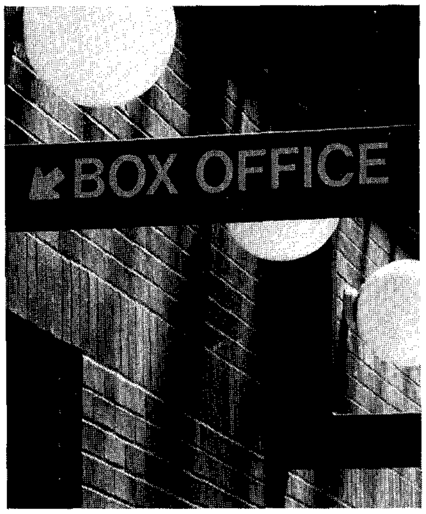
Author of TCG's "Theatre Facts 84," Robert Holley writes: "Fueled by the progress made during the 1960s and 1970s, the nonprofit professional theatre has grown from a handful of theatres barely two decades ago to a nationwide network of more than 250 theatres today. It is the chief originator and producer of theatre in America; such a theatre exists only with a delicate combination of public and private subsidy."

The total audience in '84 was 15,500,000 (out of which 1,100,000 were subscribers) in theatres with operating expenses of $230,300,000. The work force (artists, craftsmen, administrators) was 23,000—the salaries, fees, royalties and commissions accounting for 60% of all theatre expense. *But*—the big but—whereas attendance was up 11%, and total income ($145,884,360) also increased last year, so also did the cries of alarm, because from '83 to '84 the deficits almost *doubled*, and although during the last five years total income of a sample group of 37 theatres increased by 65%, so expenses grew by more—71%.



Holley continues: "while the productivity of the non-profit professional theatre has made quantum leaps, the costs of doing business have grown faster than available income, and long range planning efforts have been hampered by a rapidly shifting philanthropic terrain."

Slashed by our man-of-the-people, Mr. Reagan—along with Amtrak, college loans, and other middle-class perks (necessities? niceties?)—is what's happened to support for theatre (and the other arts). Less from both the National Endowment for the Arts (down 11.7%) and National Endowment for the Humanities (down 10%), government support has now dropped to fourth place in contributed income to non-profit theatre. And the fiscal 1986 request ($144.5 million) is $19 million below fiscal '85.



(As an aside you might consider—from *American Theatre*—President R. has requested $1.9 trillion for military spending in the next five years. That is $43 million every hour through 1990, an average cost of $20,000 to every one of us who pays taxes. Cutting the NEA appropriation by $19 million in 1986 will keep the defense department running less than 27 minutes.)

If it weren't for congress! In each of the last four years it has appropriated more than the President has asked for. As Representative Thomas Downy, a Democrat from N.Y., said: "when we starve the Endowment budgets, we starve our own soul, and that's a bad and stupid thing to do."

Which is only part of the picture. In '84 the Foundations (which were largely responsible for the '60s and '70s growth) dropped 7%, to last place among the five major contributing sources. Moving into second place, Corporate and business support grew by 24%, which, according to Holley "is the most important new development for non-profit theatre since the establishment of the NEA in the mid 1960s." Still and all, Democratic Senator from Rhode Island Claiborne Pell (he helped write original legislation for the Endowments in the '60s) has said—despite the rhetoric from the administration in the past four years—"the private sector is unable to fill the gap created by cuts in federal support."

Finally, it was individuals who contributed the most; 82,400 people gave 27% above '83, reflecting the incentives effected by Reagan's Economic Recovery Act of 1981. The proposed '85 tax plan will remove those same incentives—if it's enacted. But the bigger rub is that this support—the audience—is squirrely. Subject to its whims of liking or disliking in the *de gustibus non est disputandum* way, audiences tend—unfortunately—towards the traditional and known—not the new. The fearful consensus among some thinking theatre types is that in order to appeal to its mercurial audience, to keep as solvent as possible (to survive indeed), theatres will slide towards the sure and leave the untried untried.

Karl Rawicz, Artistic Director of Marin Theatre Company—where, last winter, I saw a good production of John Guare's strange, interesting (if dated) "House of Blue Leaves"—complained of how when he put this play up his subscribers bitched and moaned, and the general audience didn't come. As, say, in contrast to one of the classics, or something by Sam Shepard (so known if so ununderstood). Well, Rawicz's subscribers are his bread and butter.

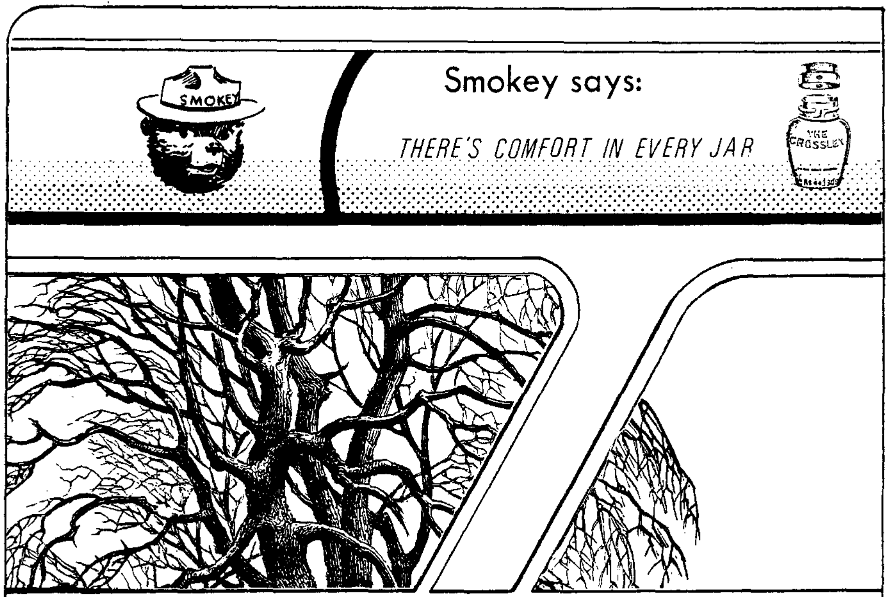
The subscribers, bless them (and curse them), and the general audience are the bread and butter of all regional theatre now, number one in getting up the dough. So, what does this portend for theatre's artistic inventiveness? And its freedom? And/or what about next year? If the tax structure changes—if the incentives are taken away?

In his editorial in the March issue of *American Theatre* Peter Zeisler, the editor of the magazine and director of TCG, wrote: "I wonder whether our theatre is sliding into a profound malaise . . . . true, there was no mass closing of theatres last year, but more than 120 theatres posted deficits despite record attendance. My fear is that the rapidly escalating number of theatres with serious negative fund balances will almost certainly be followed by the wide deployment of risk-containing measures and expanded efforts to maximize income."

According to Zeisler it was partly better in the old days of the '50s, '60s, and '70s when there was summer stock, resident theatres, an off-off Broadway movement in New York and other places, and finally the burgeoning of regional theatre around the country. First, if all these venues did not always provide fantastic theatre, they did provide employment and activity and excitement and the opportunity to be creative and innovative. What's happening today is, as far as Zeisler can see, "a growing chaos" (which was the title of the editorial) in which the small theatre is hurt most. And, he says, not only are these small theatres the ones who take the risk, but they are also where the "young artists are most likely to find employment and to gain experience . . . an important part of a professional maturation process."

On the California Trail they used to draw the wagons into a circle for protection when they stopped for the night. So, is that smoke rising from *council* fires in theatres throughout this country? Or are the wagons burning? Well, one thing to know is where there's smoke there's fire. No?

The movie crew is standing alongside a frozen road in New York state in the early '60s. It's winter; there's snow on the ground. The crew is drinking



Gregory and Stan regularly ride the bus to work together. Usually, Gregory does most of the talking. Lately, he's been preoccupied. His job runs out in June and new jobs are scarce. The other day though, he changed the subject to Teddy Bears.

(Bus stop. Three new passengers.)

It turns out Gregory is one of the nation's leading authorities on Teddy Bears. "What figure in this century," he asked Stan, "what figure, real or imagined, is so unambiguous a symbol of comfort as the Teddy Bear?" Stan couldn't think of a single one.

(Stop. Six high school kids off at the back.)

Gregory showed Stan a letter from Bruce Bleery. Bleery, Gregory explained, is a businessman who operates a chain of Teddy Bear collectors' dens, and he puts out a magazine called "Paw Prints."

(Stop. Two off, two on, and the bus idles awhile.)

➚

coffee and milling around. You can tell it's a movie location by the number of coffee cups on the ground; when the shooting's finished the craft's service man will sweep them up, along with the other debris.

The road is near Hudson, and Hudson is near Poughkeepsie, which is where Vassar College is. This movie company has been on location for three weeks, shooting a lot of night schedule. The crew is tired; shooting nights cuts into the social schedule, the drinking and hanky-panky and such. And now that morning a bus-load of Vassar girls is coming out to see *how* a movie is made. Who could care less?

I remember the sky was gray and it was cold as hell, when suddenly a cry rang out. "THE BUS IS COMING!"

We heard it, and then we saw it, and then it passed by me and the make-up man who was standing next to me. He and I looked up into the bus windows to see all those pink-cheeked, fresh-faced young women. They were smiling at us, pressing close to the glass to look out. They were *beautiful!*

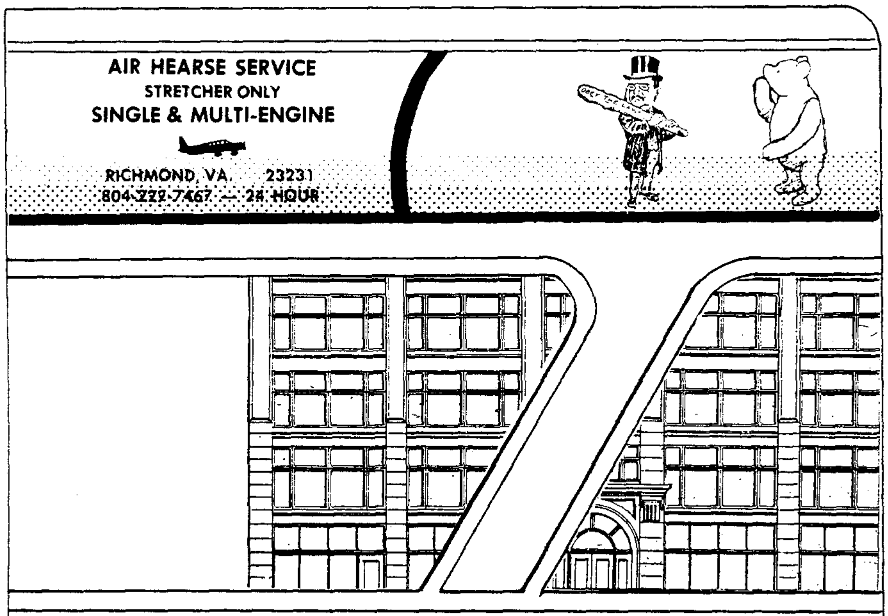
"My God!" the make-up man said, looking reverently up to heaven, "did you see? A whole bus—full of candy mountains!"

For me, the theatre-goer, San Francisco this past year has been a Candy Mountain town. The magical mythical Traveling Jewish Theatre, chiding me to hurry up and catch their myth and wisdom. At the activist Eureka, Caryl Churchill's "Top Girls," and Dario Fo's "The Accidental Death of an Anarchist" (with Geoff Hoyle). And there was Geoff Hoyle again and his performance at the Julia Morgan theatre in Berkeley, a kind of *new* vaudeville clown work, called "Theatre of Panic." Triple or quadruple threat this man Hoyle is; he's *also* Star clown (along with Larry Pisoni, the founder) in the Pickle Family Circus. In these days that's theatre too and it went up at Christmas at the Palace of Fine Arts, which is a hard-top auditorium and not a tent.

The Magic has two theatres—one entirely a different performance space from the other; at them were "War Horses," "Geniuses," "The Couch." Berkeley Repertory has the finest theatre and perhaps—for me—the most consistently satisfying productions: Amlin Gray's "Kingdom Come," and no-relation Simon Gray's "Otherwise Engaged," then a stunning Sam Shepard's "Tooth of Crime," and Emily Mann's "Execution of Justice" (jointly presented with the Eureka and The San Jose Repertory).

There was the aforementioned "House of Blue Leaves," and "What the Butler Saw" at The Marin Theatre Company. Last summer were three lively Shakespeares in the open air Hinkel Park amphitheatre in Berkeley, of which I thought "The Merchant of Venice" best. Then, for another at Christmas, there was the astonishing production of "Nicholas Nickelby" at the College of Marin (another best-theatre around the bay), a junior college which mounts as professional-looking a production as anybody (and more so than some); Arthur Miller's vintage and traditional tragedy, "A View from the Bridge" and "Terra Nova," by Ted Tally produced at Theatre Arts of Marin (TAM).

And actor/story-teller Spalding Gray's full length monologue, "Swimming to Cambodia" at New Performance Gallery; not to forget the San Francisco Mime Troupe's "Factwino: The Opera." Or One Act Theatre's: "Dancing to Good Coun-



The letter was postmarked Honolulu. Even though Bleery lives in Washington D.C., all his mail is routed through a radio station he owns in Hawaii. According to Bleery, that's because he doesn't trust the San Francisco Post Office. Stan nodded. He too had known many strange characters who worked there.

(Stop. Three off, two on.)

In the letter, Bleery offered to publish Gregory's research. Stan noticed that the letter's closing was : " Friendly grrrrs,
(signed) Bruce Bleery, Bearo No. 1."

(Stop. One on.)

Gregory wants Bleery to set up a Teddy Bear museum, with Gregory as curator. When they got off the bus, Gregory was telling Stan he wouldn't have any trouble building a collection. Lots of older people, rather than take their Teddy Bears to the grave, would give them to a museum.

try Music," "Toys for Men," "Generations," and "Thymus Vulgaris." And old trouper Viveca Lindfors' "Anna," Euripides' (through Jean-Paul Sartre) "Trojan Women" in modern dress, and the *Vaudeville Nouveau* company production of "Savage Chicken," (clown, acrobat, juggling show) all at a real corner pocket theatre, the San Francisco Repertory. A Candy Mountain theatre scene indeed . . .

And speaking of new vaudeville, last summer at the Olympic Arts Festival was Robert Woodruff's production of Shakespeare's "Comedy of Errors" (originally put up at Chicago's Goodman Theatre) as an example of the genre. It interests me, this revivalist vaudeville, informed by the idea that a kind of comedy—not necessarily Ha-Ha—is a way of making the best comment on the world—because drama doesn't do it anymore.

If, behind some kinds of the laughter, is a terrible rage at society's iniquities, and sometimes also a little potential panic, a lot of this is being produced as theatre these days. And the form ranges from circus and so-called comedy acts to the genre which is called "new vaudeville," the latter including a commitment to traditional dramatic elements: character development and story line, but also an innovation that breaks with traditional structures and acting. San Francisco is a kind of heartland for it with artists like Bill Irwin, Geoff Hoyle, Larry Pisoni and his Pickle Family Circus, and the Eureka Theatre's production of Dario Fo's "Accidental Death of an Anarchist," and *Vaudeville Nouveau*. This year there's a great deal of cross pollination; next year Larry Eilenberg, chair of the Theatre Department at S.F. State University, told me they are putting on a festival of it.

In his piece in the March *American Theatre* Ron Jenkins does a comprehensive job of defining it, writing of its link to experimental theatre in the '60s—which has its historical precedents also. "Twentieth century avant-garde artists have often turned to circus and music hall techniques when searching for ways to revitalize their theatre," he writes.

Given the various nature of what is put up locally, it seemed to me San Francisco would be a good place to see as a microcosm of theatre in this country. According to the local Bay Area Theatre Alliance, there's a total of 95 theatre companies in the six counties, from Santa Cruz in the south to Marin in the north, with four of them, ACT (American Conservatory Theatre), Berkeley Rep, San Jose Rep, Berkeley Shakespeare, having Equity L.O.R.T.—League of Resident Theatre—contracts (a money range between $306-$388/week). Two others, the Eureka and Magic, have an L.O.A.—Letters of Agreement—($70 for a 20 hour week). And there are Equity Policy Statements in effect with the One-Act Theatre Company and the San Francisco Rep. ($7.50-$10/performance, plus carfare reimbursement). The other 85-odd companies pay from nothing to $15/performance—maybe something for rehearsals, maybe something for transportation. So, it's not exactly fat-city for actors.

Statistics in a recent S.F. Sunday *Examiner/Chronicle* "Pinky" (the entertainment section) indicate that something like 60-70 actors find seasonal employment in the Bay Area, and another 25-30 make *something* free-lancing. Given the above rates of pay, if—at the top end—an actor might eke out a living, he/she is not going to get rich. Yet Sigrid Wurschmidt, Eureka Theatre ("Top Girls"), Bay Area Critics awards recipient, in NY from '81-'83, said (speaking of why she works in this town): "I could have shopped myself in a very commercial way in New York . . . making a great deal of money . . . but it's not why I'm in this business . . . I want to be an artist in my community . . ."

Then, says Misha Berson, past Executive Director of TCCBA (Theatre Communications Center of the Bay Area): "What actors get here is incredible experience. If you go to New York you have to stand in line just to be in a play reading. Here, at least, you have a variety of work to choose from, to cut your teeth on. The problem and challenge is to keep actors here once they've matured as performers. That's why we need to start paying actors more."

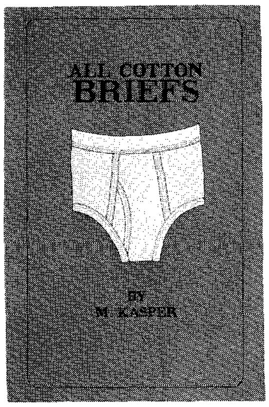
Academic and playwright Larry Eilenberg argued with me when I said I saw San Francisco as a microcosm of the American theatre scene. On the contrary, he said, "in most of the country theatre roots tend to be European. Here they are Asian, *or* indigenously American: mining camps, vaudeville, and music hall. Or spectacle or performance art . . ." Pointing out that a toleration of many different visions, as well as a multiplicity of life styles is characteristic of only a few cities outside San Francisco, that's a reason that makes theatre here so multifarious—and the weather is also conducive. "People can work outdoors—the vaudevillians at the Cannery, Ghirardelli Square, Pier 39, Union Square—performance art at outdoor sites. Which is much cheaper!" And that, too, "theatre here has been non-commercial in intent in a way that most other cities are not."

So, in SF the performers don't have to contend with rain and snow, as they would in NY where there's a similar vitality but less accessible space and time. So, San Francisco's style has helped define San Francisco's theatre. Although not an original idea with him, Eilenberg said to look at both theatrical history and what is happening contemporaneously; where theatre's excellent is where people walk around and are *forced* to observe each other all the time. New York and San Francisco are both cities like that.

"As L.A. is not," he said. In spite of all the available talent, the shadow of film and television makes everything a showcase, and that undermines the seriousness of theatrical purpose. "There's a lot of it down there," he said, "and all in service of something else."

So—in San Francisco the theatre news is not so bad. According to *Call Board* (monthly newsletter of TCCBA), the '84-'85 allocations from the Publicity and Advertising Fund of the city's hotel tax represents a 5% increase from a year ago. And $465.5 thousand, 12.5% of the total fund, will be distributed as grants to 16 theatre companies: ACT, Asian-American, Bayview Rep., Eureka, Julian, Lilith, Magic, Make-A-Circus, One Act, Pickle Family Circus, SF Mime Troupe, SF Rep., SEW/Lorraine Hansberry, Talespinners, Theatre Rhinoceros, A Traveling Jewish Theatre.

On the record, local politicians too support the arts. Three members of the S.F. Board of Supervisors' finance Committee approved legislation, drafted by a fourth, to increase the portion of the hotel tax that goes to cultural events. The increase from 12.5% to 16.5%, if approved by our lady mayor and the full board, means there will be still more money coming this year. Never enough, but more. ☐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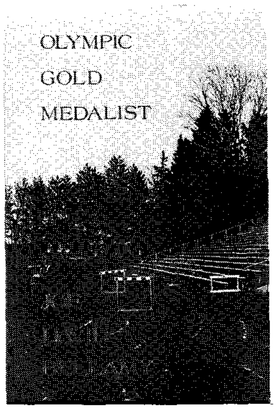
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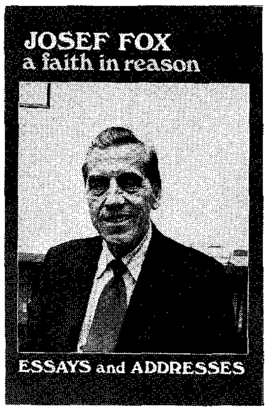
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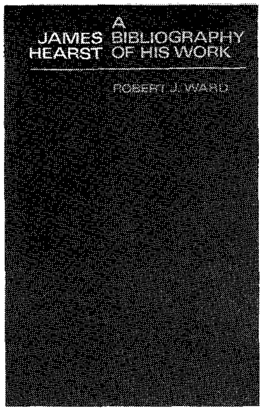
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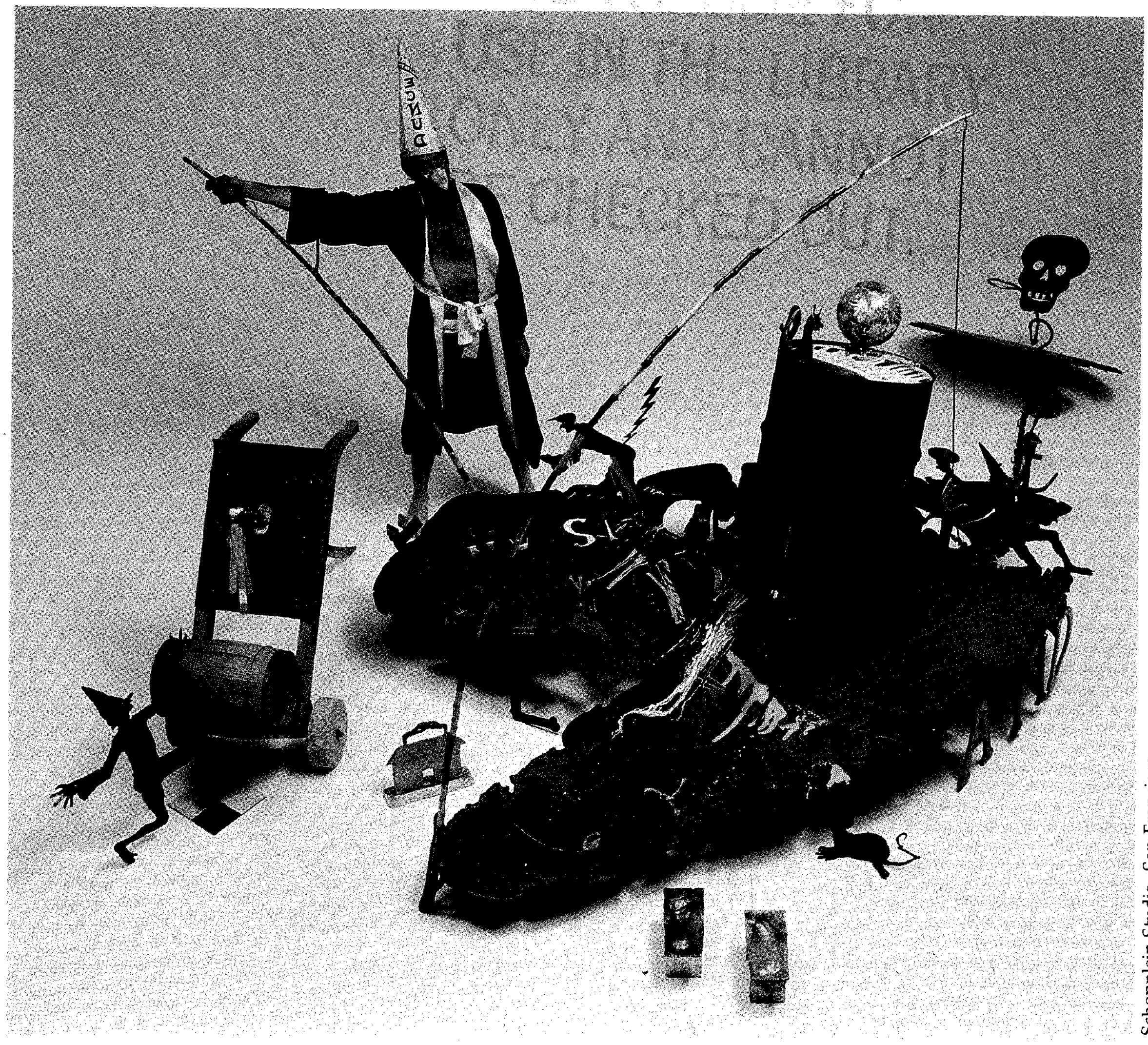

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William T. Wiley, *Nomad Is an Island*, 1981; Corten steel, wood, stainless steel, copper, lead, paint; 114 × 216 × 240″.

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